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Germany's Cold War on Display: The Political Aesthetics of German-German Relations, 1949-1989

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Abstract

This dissertation examines domestic culture as a project of nation building in a divided Germany between 1949 and 1989. Soviet and American backing during escalating Cold War tensions pulled East and West Germans in opposing ideological directions, which they initially expressed in diverging aesthetics. Historiography on German material culture traditionally concentrates on the East-West competition during the first two decades of the Cold War. By extending the narrative into the 1970s and 1980s, *Germany's Cold War on Display: The Political Aesthetics of German-German Relations, 1949-1989* argues instead that internal economic and political collaboration between the two German states created an alternative to Americanization and Sovietization – a third way that allowed for German cultural rapprochement within the context of European integration. To display changes in political culture and trace their effect on the German-German relationship, this study analyses archival documents alongside objects of domestic culture. This approach includes a discussion of five interior design dimensions: the institutionalization process, the design discourse, production and consumption processes, furniture trade, and diplomatic utilization of design. Postwar reconstruction presented the "two countries in one German nation" with both opportunities and challenges in redefining their nationhood, global position, and cultural reputation. After initial delineation, East and West Germany's aesthetic convergence began in the mid-1960s with domestic critiques of their respective political systems. Cultural and economic cooperation following the 1972 Basic Treaty on Germany's status quo enabled both states to detach their handling of the German Question from superpower policies. One major impulse sought to salvage ties by increasing trade, resulting in a similar interior design aesthetic that facilitated exports. Other endeavors focused on normalizing German relations through cultural encounters and political treaties, reconnecting populations on both sides of the border. Concentrating on similarities and collaboration, this study refocuses Germany's Cold War - that is, the special relationship between the two German states - and offers a new context in which to understand the relative stability during four decades of division and considerably smooth transition to unification in 1990.

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GERMANY'S COLD WAR ON DISPLAY:
THE POLITICAL AESTHETICS OF GERMAN-GERMAN RELATIONS, 1949-1989

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GERMANY'S COLD WAR ON DISPLAY:

THE POLITICAL AESTHETICS OF GERMAN-GERMAN RELATIONS

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Katrin Schreier

*To my grandfather Rudolf Busch.
His memory has been an inspiration.*

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ABSTRACT

GERMANY'S COLD WAR ON DISPLAY:
THE POLITICAL AESTHETICS OF GERMAN-GERMAN RELATIONS, 1949-1989

Katrin Schreiter

Professor Thomas Childers

This dissertation examines domestic culture as a project of nation building in a divided Germany between 1949 and 1989. Soviet and American backing during escalating Cold War tensions pulled East and West Germans in opposing ideological directions, which they initially expressed in diverging aesthetics. Historiography on German material culture traditionally concentrates on the East-West competition during the first two decades of the Cold War. By extending the narrative into the 1970s and 1980s, *Germany's Cold War on Display: The Political Aesthetics of German-German Relations, 1949-1989* argues instead that internal economic and political collaboration between the two German states created an alternative to Americanization and Sovietization – a third way that allowed for German cultural rapprochement within the context of European integration. To display changes in political culture and trace their effect on the German-German relationship, this study analyses archival documents alongside objects of domestic culture. This approach includes a discussion of five interior design dimensions: the institutionalization process, the design discourse, production and consumption processes, furniture trade, and diplomatic utilization of design. Postwar reconstruction presented the “two countries in one German nation” with both

opportunities and challenges in redefining their nationhood, global position, and cultural reputation. After initial delineation, East and West Germany's aesthetic convergence began in the mid-1960s with domestic critiques of their respective political systems. Cultural and economic cooperation following the 1972 Basic Treaty on Germany's status quo enabled both states to detach their handling of the German Question from superpower policies. One major impulse sought to salvage ties by increasing trade, resulting in a similar interior design aesthetic that facilitated exports. Other endeavors focused on normalizing German relations through cultural encounters and political treaties, reconnecting populations on both sides of the border. Concentrating on similarities and collaboration, this study refocuses Germany's Cold War – that is, the special relationship between the two German states – and offers a new context in which to understand the relative stability during four decades of division and considerably smooth transition to unification in 1990.

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INTRODUCTION: GERMANY'S COLD WAR ON DISPLAY

With the statement that “the *entire* German people are called on to achieve by free self-determination the unity and freedom of Germany,” the 1949 Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) posed an immediate dilemma to a newly divided Germany.¹ In spite of this proclamation for national unity, four years of allied occupation had already pulled East and West Germans in different directions. Through Soviet and American patronage during rising Cold War tensions, Germans identified politically with their respective bloc alliance rather than with the Germany on the other side of the border. Moving further away from unification, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Federal Republic faced the same problem of defining their new state systems. This study examines domestic culture (*Wohnkultur*) as a project of nation building in the two German states to display changes in political culture and how these changes affected their relationship. Ironically, their attempts at expressing difference unintentionally created a shared code of ideological inscription in the German everyday. Along the way, Cold War confrontation evolved into German cooperation through reciprocal influences and information exchanges in the realm of interior design. But how did material culture emerge as a recognizable language in the intra-German relationship and which functions did it serve? To answer these questions, this work offers a new perspective on Germany's Cold War by integrating the material and political ambitions of the two German states in one history of Germany's aesthetic reconstruction.²

¹ *Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany*, 23 May 1949. Emphasis by the author.

² In my usage of nouns describing the eastern and the western part of Germany, I tried to refrain from employing ideologically loaded language. I use the terms “Federal Republic of Germany,” “Federal Republic,” “German Democratic Republic,” and “GDR” like they would be employed in German – without any ideological connotation. But the different linguistic traditions in the English language make it necessary to point out that also the abbreviation “FRG” as well as “West Germany” and “East Germany”

More than two decades after German unification, the historiography of Germany's postwar decades remains starkly divided.³ In the first years after 1989 with newly available sources, scholars in Europe and the United States produced a flood of narratives about the East German state. Controversies emerged over the relative stability of communist rule, which collapsed so suddenly after four decades.⁴ West Germany's seemingly untainted success served as a benchmark against which to measure the East German past. Even in recent years, seminal syntheses of postwar Germany have handled the GDR as a footnote to history.⁵ Scholarship on East Germany has not entered the mainstream of German history, which still develops largely against the backdrop of the Third Reich.⁶ The task for historians of postwar Germany is to offer narratives that, as

are value free denominations for the two German states. Especially the latter allows for an easy geographical identification. I tried to avoid the shorthand East and West as to not confuse my readers when I am addressing the larger East-West conflict between the superpowers. However, if I used East and West in relation to the two German states, then I made the specific meaning evident through context.

³ Elizabeth Harvey evaluated the state of the field of German history instantly after unification in 1990. Her calls for a useful integrated German history are still echoed today. Elizabeth Harvey, "The Two Germanies: Recent Publications on the Federal Republic, the German Democratic Republic and the German Question," *The Historical Journal* 33, no. 4 (1990): 953-970; H-German Forum on the integration of postwar German history, January and February 2011.

⁴ The range of explanations for the GDR's stability reaches from the intimidation of the population through the surveillance state (*Überwachungsstaat*), over the political structures of a dictatorship of mass organizations to the social consensus induced by the welfare state (Konrad Jarausch's *Fürsorgestaat*) and the niche society (*Nischengesellschaft*). Most of these approaches are marked by at times implicit, but often explicit comparisons with the Third Reich and its historiography. These comparative studies of the two German dictatorships convince through the apparent parallels of the one-party state. In England, a group of scholars has focused on the seemingly contradictory ways in which the stability of the GDR worked in the social realm. Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949-1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Jeannette Z. Madarász, *Conflict and Compromise in East Germany, 1971-1989: A Precarious Stability* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 2003); Catherine Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries: German Communists and Their Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). A similar approach has been taken by Andrew I. Port, *Conflict and Stability in the German Democratic Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁵ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte IV* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2008), pp. xv-xvi; Heinrich August Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen II: Deutsche Geschichte 1933-1990* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2000); Edgar Wolfrum, *Die geglättete Demokratie: Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland von ihren Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2006).

⁶ Exceptions to the rule present studies that compare how the two German states came to terms with the Nazi past. See for example Jürgen Danyel (ed.), *Die geteilte Vergangenheit. Zum Umgang mit Nationalsozialismus und Widerstand in beiden deutschen Staaten* (Berlin: Akademie, 1995).

Konrad Jarausch put it, “break out of the straight-jacket of parallel stories” and instead look at mutual influence and internal relationships.⁷

At the heart of this literature is the problem of how to bring together the history of two competing systems so deeply connected to the bipolar Cold War climate. Detailed analysis of what held Germans together still needs to be undertaken. Why did the GDR not emulate the Austrian path and emerge as a distinct state in its own right? If cultural nationalism is the dominant explanation for the special “German-German” relationship, why does this not apply to the Germans of Switzerland – who have created instead a nation of multiple ethnicities? The unification of 1990, enveloping the former GDR into the Federal Republic, must be examined without the teleological assumption that East and West Germany are easily identified as one nation. After all, nobody in Germany, East or West, believed that reunification would be possible up to the point when it actually happened.⁸ With these problems in mind, the challenge is to present a methodological alternative in approaching the German past that highlights the interconnectedness of the two states.

Germany’s postwar division posed a great problem: redefining the nation after German nationalism had been unmasked as ruthless and cruel in the first half of the

⁷ Konrad Jarausch, “Divided, Yet Reunited - The Challenge of Integrating German Post-War Histories,” *H-German Forum*, 1 February 2011.

⁸ Literature has explored very different factors that play a role in illuminating the sudden collapse of the GDR: the changing international system of the Cold War, the lacking political-military support by the Soviet Union, the immanent state bankruptcy after four decades of command economy and the resulting failure to fulfill the population’s consumer demands. What is striking is the isolated examination of the GDR – the Federal Republic plays only a role insofar as it is the objectionable opposite and the ideology to be defeated. See Ina Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis: Die Geschichte der Konsumkultur in der DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1999); Raymond Stokes, *Constructing Socialism: Technology and Change in East Germany 1945-1990* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Jonathan R. Zatlin, *The Currency of Socialism: Money and Political Culture in East Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

twentieth century. With the horrors of the Second World War and the genocide of Europe's Jewish population fresh in mind, the racial nationalism of the Third Reich complicated the search for acceptable political values. Nationalistic definitions that stressed German exceptionality became unacceptable, to which the West German decision to remove the first stanza from the German national anthem aptly attests. Germany should never again aspire to stand "above everything in the world."⁹ In a parallel development, allied involvement and policy prescription left the population with a sense of insecurity about the origins of the states, which hindered their political identification with postwar Germany. Facing Germans' retreat from public life after years of mobilization in mass organizations and the military, politicians in the two German states followed them into the living room and politicized the German home. In cooperation with cultural and economic elites they employed interior design to create distinct national domestic cultures as integrative concepts that communicated the new political order.

The political dimension of German interiors has, of course, been acknowledged by the literature on the history of public housing. Discussions of the early twentieth century reform movements, such as the Werkbund and the Bauhaus, have debated past visions of "everything from the spoon to the city" for the aesthetic uplift of the lower classes. While these attempts have been coined an elitist failure, scholars agree on the success of the pioneering work of New Architecture (*Neues Bauen*) and the closely connected New Objectivity (*Neue Sachlichkeit*), which revolutionized the structural

⁹ The first stanza of the Song of the Germans began with the words "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles, über alles in der Welt." After two world wars, these lines had received a strong expansionist meaning. To regain the trust of the international community, the German successor states wanted to prove that they practiced collaboration and diplomacy instead of military aggression.

conditions in workers' living quarters in the Frankfurt am Main of the 1920s.¹⁰ The housing shortage after the destruction of the Second World War guaranteed that such socio-political programs remained a central part of national politics in the FRG and the GDR alike. However, this time the effort did not simply aim at creating the architectural shell of the German home; rather, both German states utilized the opportunity of the bomb-shattered towns to bring the new reality of the German division into the private sphere.¹¹

Building on these accounts of earlier reform movements, a new school of German design history has emerged that finds strong national impulses in the making of postwar material culture. Treatments of the modernist heritage in West German everyday design focus on the political reinvigoration of a (West) German national style, while analyses of East German cultural policy discuss it as an embodiment of a socialist modern identity.¹² Both strands of literature gesture to the respective other part of Germany, but a balanced

¹⁰ Heinz Hirdina, *Neues Bauen, Neues Gestalten. Das neue Frankfurt/Die neue Stadt: eine Zeitschrift zwischen 1926 und 1933*, Amt für Industrielle Formgestaltung, ed. (Berlin: Elefanten Press 1984); Andreas Butter, *Neues Leben, Neues Bauen: Die Moderne in der Architektur der SBZ/DDR 1945-1951* (Berlin: Hans Schiller, 2006);

Joan Campbell, *The German Werkbund: The Politics of Reform in the Applied Arts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); Christina Biundo and others, *Bauhaus-Ideen 1919-1994. Bibliographie und Beiträge zur Rezeption des Bauhausgedankens* (Berlin: Reimer, 1994).

¹¹ Werner Durth, "Kontraste und Parallelen: Architektur und Städtebau in West und Ostdeutschland," in Axel Schildt, Arnold Sywottek, eds., *Modernisierung im Wiederaufbau: Die westdeutsche Gesellschaft der 50er Jahre* (Bonn: Dietz, 1993).

¹² Paul Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects: A Cultural History of West German Industrial Design* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008); and Eli Rubin, *Synthetic Socialism: Plastics & Dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008) offer the most widely read interpretations of industrial design in postwar Germany. German literature on the topic is represented by Christopher Oestereich "Gute Form" im Wiederaufbau: Zur Geschichte der Produktgestaltung in Westdeutschland nach 1945 (Berlin: Lukas, 2000) and Gert Selle, "Das Produktdesign der 50er Jahre: Rückgriff in die Entwurfsgeschichte, vollendete Modernisierung des Alltagsinventars oder Vorbote der Postmoderne?" in Axel Schildt, Arnold Sywottek, eds., *Modernisierung im Wiederaufbau: Die westdeutsche Gesellschaft der 50er Jahre* (Bonn: Dietz, 1993), 612-624; and Gert Selle, *Geschichte des Design in Deutschland*, Second Edition (Frankfurt: Campus, [1994] 2007). Ronald Stade offers an account of the politics behind GDR aesthetics in "Designs of Identity: The Politics of aesthetics in the GDR," *Ethnos* 58, no. 3/4 (1993): 241-258.

analysis remains to be written. Recently, Greg Castillo's work on the "soft power" of midcentury design has provided a first comparative study of political utilization of modern design principles in the two German states' mutual dealings.¹³ However, he focuses foremost on the superpower struggle over cultural domination of Germany. Like most scholars in this field, he limits his examination of cultural policy to the first two postwar decades, a period marked by intense competition between eastern and western ways of life. As a result, such studies subordinate internal German relations to the larger picture of bloc alliance in the East-West superpower conflict. On closer examination, however, this period of delineation should be understood as a prelude to the détente of the 1970s. As the signing of the German Basic Treaty in 1972 "normalized" the antagonistic relationship between the two German states, a long-term analysis that expands to 1989 can provide insights into a more diverse political utilization of German material culture – and thus into the internal German relationship – than has been known so far.

In addition to extending the chronological parameters of the literature, a fruitful examination of German material culture needs to bring back into focus Germany itself and the relationship between its two parts. The East-West conflict's tensions left Europe with the problem of whether or not Germany should be able to unite and which role it should play in the region. While this "German Question" lost its political urgency after the peaceful unification of 1990, it is still part and parcel of its Cold War history. Over the past decade, a renewed historical interest in the German Cold War has brought

¹³ Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). Design historian Jeremy Aynsley's account of at times parallel, at times opposing East and West German aesthetic developments covers the entire Cold War period: Jeremy Aynsley, *Designing Modern Germany* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009).

forward studies that approach it from both cultural and political perspectives.¹⁴

Diplomatic and international historians have looked at the German Question mostly from the nervous perspective of its European neighbors or in regards to the national security concerns of the Soviet Union and the United States. The general consensus finds that nobody but the Germans themselves desired unity.¹⁵ Superpower attempts at containing each part of Germany within their sphere of influence has led cultural historians of the Cold War to look at German political, cultural, and economic development through the lens of Americanization and/or Sovietization.¹⁶ While these paradigms have long dominated the analysis of postwar Germany, over the past decade Americanization has been challenged by a more inclusive concept of Westernization, which sees cultural and social practices in Germany as products of a constant exchange of ideas between Europe

¹⁴ Uta Balbier, *Kalter Krieg auf der Aschenbahn. Deutsch-deutscher Sport 1950-72, eine politische Geschichte* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2007); William Glenn Gray, *Germany's Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949-1969* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); M.E. Sarotte, *Dealing with the Devil: East Germany, Détente & Ostpolitik, 1969-1973* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001) represent a vanguard in what will hopefully become a larger trend.

¹⁵ Even Germans entertained a multitude of perspectives on the German Question. The traditionalist view saw the question in freeing the GDR from the shackles of communism with the ultimate goal of forming a nation-state. Policies that represented this view usually came from the conservative political spectrum. The Europeanist view centered on Germany's role in Europe, trying to move Germany from the periphery of the Western Alliance to the center in an increasingly significant political entity. This conception has less to do with the notion of German unity than with the reestablishment of its economic and political significance. This view was held by liberal parties. The universalist view followed a contrary idea that saw Germans overcome their political division and their past by promoting universal values such as peace, social justice, and environmental preservation. The Green party as well as segments of the cultural elite supported this approach. At one time or the other, the underlying premises of these conceptions informed in different ways East and West German decision-making in western relations, East-West relations, and especially in the internal German relationship. Anne-Marie Burley, "The Once and Future German Question," *Foreign Affairs* 68, no. 5 (1989): 66.

¹⁶ Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Konrad Jarausch and Hannes Siegrist, ed. *Amerikanisierung und Sowjetisierung in Deutschland, 1945-1970* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1997). An excellent example of this literature is Uta Poiger, *Jazz, Rock and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000; Petra Goedde, *GIs and Germans: Culture, Gender, and Foreign Relations, 1945-1949* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

and North America.¹⁷ Looking at the Cold War from the German perspective, it becomes evident that after the initial postwar years under the Marshall Plan, Western European influences dominated cultural and economic considerations of *Wohnkultur*.

Finally, the literature on economic reconstruction must also be considered. The importance of economic success for political legitimacy in the East-West competition has long been acknowledged.¹⁸ Taking the capability to offer the population a comfortable and adequate standard of living as the ultimate marker of economic success has led many cultural studies to evaluate economic performance exclusively based on consumer satisfaction.¹⁹ This interpretation is consistent with a general shift in postwar European economic behavior when consumption started to take precedence over social security, trading rights for goods.²⁰ Product design served as *lingua franca* in the Cold War competition, as exemplified by the famous Kitchen Debate between Khrushchev and Nixon in 1959.²¹ What differentiated the situation in the German context decisively from the Soviet-American conflict is the shared cultural heritage – it was not just a competition

¹⁷ See most notably Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, *Wie westlich sind die Deutschen? Amerikanisierung und Westernisierung im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1999) and Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through 20th-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2005).

¹⁸ See for example Mark E Spicka, *Selling the Economic Miracle: Economic Reconstruction and Politics in West Germany, 1949-1957* (New York: Berghahn, 2007); James C. Van Hook, *Rebuilding Germany: The Creation of the Social Market Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); André Steiner, *Von Plan zu Plan: Eine Wirtschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (Munich: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2004); Christoph Buchheim, *Die Wiedereingliederung Westdeutschlands in die Weltwirtschaft, 1945-1958* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1990).

¹⁹ Consumption in both East and West has been studied extensively. For examples see Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis*; Judd Stitzel, *Fashioning Socialism: Clothing, Politics, and Consumer Culture in East Germany* (Oxford: Berg, 2005); David E. Crew, ed., *Consuming Germany in the Cold War* (Oxford: Berg, 2003); Jennifer A. Loehlin, *From Rugs to Riches: Housework, Consumption and Modernity in Germany* (Oxford: Berg, 1999); NGBK (ed.), *Wunderwirtschaft: Konsumgeschichte in den 60er Jahren* (Cologne 1996).

²⁰ De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 341.

²¹ Susan E. Reid, "Who Will Best Whom? Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9, no. 4 (2008): 855-904.

for economic preeminence between East and West Germany; it was also a rediscovery of forgotten similarities.

It is true that German-German relations during the Cold War represented a piecemeal effort to coexist in a geopolitical situation marked by rising superpower tensions. East Germany's wish to delineate itself from the West stood against West Germany's claim to sole German representation and its official refusal to acknowledge the GDR. Nevertheless, they kept open avenues of interaction in the hopes of salvaging what was left of the cultural and economic (not to mention familial) bonds between them. These channels of communication were subject to constant redefinition, entangling both countries in formal as well as informal interactions. In examining a process of rapprochement, there are always the pitfalls of teleology that do a disservice to the historian's task of exploring patterns of past developments. Convergence theory of the 1960s predicted the inevitable rapprochement of capitalist and socialist countries. Facing the same challenges of the industrial age, the theory assumed, both systems would solve their respective problems with similar technological means, which eventually would create the same social and political modernity. East and West Germany, left to deal with the wartime destruction of their infrastructure and industry, might seem like ideal candidates for applying this theory. On closer examination, however, convergence implies a kind of linear determinism that overlooks the internal relationship that bound the two German states together. Going beyond parallel histories of convergence, this study examines processes, mechanisms, visual and spatial concepts as well as institutional and individual agency in the realm of *Wohnkultur*. This approach to the German past allows insights into mutual provocation and cooperation in the field of

cultural policy. At the center stands the question of how both Germanys turned a competitive situation, the aestheticization of the respective political orders in German material culture, into a diplomatic tool for reconciliation.

In an effort to integrate the narratives of postwar Germany, this dissertation explores the emerging internal relationship between East and West Germany by examining their respective cultural strategies for negotiating a *modus vivendi* through the medium of industrial design. In approaching this problem, I am using the perspective of material culture. Scholars, especially folklorists and anthropologists, have used material culture as a lens to reconstruct the histories of past societies.²² Material culture as an analytical perspective assumes that the entirety of material culture represents the values of the people who commission, produce, consume or use these objects; and by extension, it presupposes that they represent the values of the entire society to which they belong. Moreover, material culture is a type of historical evidence that does not contain the abstract qualities of language, which can render archival sources problematic. Words and their meaning are mediated through social context; there is no logical connection between the signifier and the signified. Words *convey* meaning. On the contrary “things both *embody* meaning and *convey* that meaning” at the same time.²³ In accord with this anthropological methodology, historian Leora Auslander once coined the term “the communicative capacity of objects” in her groundbreaking study *Taste and Power*:

²² Thomas J. Schlereth, “Material Culture Studies and Social History Research,” *Journal of Social History* 16, no. 4 (Summer, 1983): 111-143.

²³ Thomas J. Schlereth, “Material Culture Research and Historical Explanation,” *The Public Historian* 7, no. 4 (Autumn, 1985): 26. Emphasis in the original.

Furnishing Modern France.²⁴ By using material culture as a way of historical inquiry for the twentieth century, I investigate the articulation of political messages in material evidence as well as the ends to which they were employed. With a mixed methodology of material culture and traditional archival research, this study traces ideological inscription in German *Wohnkultur* and how they incidentally contributed to a growing German-German understanding.

My analysis focuses on five different, but connected, dimensions of materiality: the politicization of aesthetics, the intellectual discourse about their meaning, the realization of aesthetics in the economic spheres of production and consumption, the aesthetic dialectic of the retail and export market, and the use of objects toward diplomatic ends. Such a project required a structured research technique that started with the archival documents of the Federal Republic in the Bundesarchiv Koblenz and the papers of the GDR in the Bundesarchiv branch in Berlin to establish the institutional system surrounding official aesthetics. In a next step, design magazines, advice literature, and exhibition catalogs offered insights into the theoretical meaning of material aesthetics and its change over time. Interviews with former East and West German designers and politicians have been instrumental in closing gaps in the archival documentation of technological and aesthetic development in industrial design. They also offered valuable insights into the lived reality of Cold War Germany. In addition, visits to furniture manufacturers and retailers helped to establish the technological, material, and infrastructural challenges in furniture production. Finally, a return to the archives, this time focusing on the smaller design archives of the Rat für Formgebung in Frankfurt as

²⁴ Leora Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

well as the Werkbund and the Sammlung industrielle Gestaltung's uncataloged collection in Berlin, and the Design Archives in Brighton helped in establishing the diplomatic operationalization of material culture. Finally, the government of the Federal Republic of Germany provided me the opportunity to see previously inaccessible documents on the cultural activities of the FRG Ministry of Economics and the Permanent Representation in East Berlin.

It should be pointed out that this study is based on idealized archetypes of furniture and interior design visions. Design historians have grappled with the problem that most surviving visual representations were originally produced for publication in catalogs, coffee table books, and advice literature or to document exhibition displays. These idealized depictions of interiors have little in common with the way in which furniture is reappropriated in real life situations.²⁵ Consumers collect specific objects from among the vast impersonal array of goods on display and then arrange them in personally meaningful ways.²⁶ Similarly, these limitations apply to the documentation of German material culture. First, both the GDR and the FRG relied on such ideal interior design settings for their political projects of postwar nation building – a project of projecting an ideological identity onto the German people through streamlined and consistent life styles. Second, consumers remain a corrective to these ideal scenarios of *Wohnkultur*. While parts of the population might have actually liked the official aesthetics, the consistent application of the style was rarely executed successfully. Furniture is expensive and cannot easily be replaced on a working-class or even middle-

²⁵ Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (London: Basil-Blackwell, 1987).

²⁶ It needs to be pointed out that modern market research and product testing bring us closer to answers to these questions; however, the process of consumer decision-making remains complex. Jeffrey L. Meikle, "Material Virtues: on the Ideal and the Real in Design History," *Journal of Design History* 11, no. 3: 194.

class budget. Therefore, the problem of “wrong” or impure appropriation comes into play: one modern piece in an otherwise diversely assorted living room, such as a Cubist vase on a Chippendale sideboard, perhaps even placed on a lace table cloth to protect the antique wood, obliterates the entire aesthetic concept. The existence of different tastes equally complicates stylistic consistency: with increasing individualization of the societies in East and West Germany life styles diversified, which was often expressed in customized interior designs.²⁷

This study focuses predominately on cultural events and educational programs, which serve as indicators of official aesthetics. Design exhibitions provide a window into the ties between politics and aesthetics. Whether domestic or international, both East and West German design shows offer insights into the operationalization of material values for political goals. While national exhibits intended to enlighten the population about the ‘right’ consumption, the international exhibitions aimed at political image improvement. Both exhibition types were rooted in the conviction that aesthetic progress communicates ethical betterment – and the German living room served as moral compass. In this scenario, the consumer served as a benchmark against which to evaluate the success of the two states in implementing their ideal aesthetics in the everyday. This analysis of domestic design sheds light on the processes by which Germany became molded into East and West, acculturated in post-Nazism and postwar modernities. Moreover, it also reveals how conceptions of domestic products changed Germans’ view of each other

²⁷ The fields of philosophy and anthropology have produced an impressive body of literature that deals with the relationships between consumption, style, and individual identity. See for example Pierre Bourdieu *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, translated by R. Nice (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1984); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated by S. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California); M. Csikszentmihalyi and E. Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

throughout this transformation and brings into focus the complex challenge to create a material identity, a brand that binds together people and signifies ideological allegiance.

To effectively illustrate change over time, this study consists of two parts. The first part develops against the backdrop of East German delineation policy (*Abgrenzungspolitik*) and the West German claim to single German representation (*Alleinvertretungsanspruch*) by paying special attention to mutual pressures, action, and reaction. In the immediate postwar years, cultural delineation happened alongside the creation of new institutions for product design in both German states. By illustrating how interior design served as an aesthetic expression of East-West demarcation, it also examines avenues to project their new image to the international community. These efforts combined cultural and economic considerations to create a national brand, imprinting ideological principles onto domestic culture by prescribing official aesthetics in the making of a national domestic culture. These issues are further explored in the context of design discourse and consumer education, which presented additional efforts to align the population with the national brand. However, the two German states also depended on the participation of the production sector to forge this cohesive aesthetic. An analysis of the two German economies' ability to foster a national brand narrative against the market behavior of producers and consumers shows how regional structures undermined national aesthetic coherence. In the 1960s, rapid industrial growth challenged the cultural preeminence of design institutions in the two Germany states. Industrial and economic interests prevailed, subsuming the quest for a national aesthetic into broader considerations of productivity, efficiency, and marketability. Strong inflections of

regionalism, including regional industrial traditions in the GDR and regional politics in the FRG, weakened the coherence of national branding further.

In the second part the focus shifts from the analytical emphasis of German-German delineation policies to cultural-economic convergence and diplomatic cooperation as a specific German way of Cold War *détente*. It first explores intra-German trade within the context of the European Economic Community. West German insistence on the unresolved nature of the German Question led to the territorial integration of the GDR into the EEC and thus the Common Market. As East German consumer goods production grew dependent on trade with the West in the 1970s, the GDR chose to compromise its official aesthetic, using Western furniture styles to cater to their Western customers. Finally, this part traces German product design's diplomatic operationalization in relation to the question of East German international recognition and German-German relations between 1960 and 1989. The two German states were concerned about questions of representation, nationhood, and a basic *modus vivendi*. By looking at membership in the international design organization ICSID, industrial design exhibitions, and finally German-German cultural negotiations following the Basic Treaty, it follows the process by which the two German states grew in international importance in relationship to one another.

Postwar reconstruction presented both opportunities and challenges to the “two countries in one German nation” in redefining their nationhood, global position, and cultural reputation. This process was neither as contrarian nor as malicious as the traditional focus on intra-German competition and demarcation policies suggests. Rather, this study adds to the German material culture historiography by extending the narrative

into the 1970s and 1980s to show how internal economic and political negotiations created a third space next to Americanization and Sovietization that allowed for cultural rapprochement within the context of European integration. One major impulse sought to salvage ties by increasing trade, resulting in a similar interior design aesthetic that facilitated exports. Other endeavors focused on normalizing German relations through cultural encounters and political treaties, reconnecting populations on both sides of the border. By looking at similarities and collaboration, this study of material culture in combination with the economic dimensions of the German Question attempts to provide an alternative to traditional Cold War histories of Germany that emphasize rivalry. It is an attempt at refocusing Germany's Cold War – that is the special relationship between the two German states – and explaining the relative stability during four decades of division as well as the considerably smooth transition to unification in 1990.

CHAPTER 1: POLITICIZATION AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF INDUSTRIAL DESIGN IN EAST AND WEST GERMANY

Introduction

In 1967, Walter Gropius, the founder of the Bauhaus movement and then émigré to the United States, wrote to the Federal Republic of Germany's Ministry of Economics to intervene in the contemporary debate around state-funded design institutions. Expressing his astonishment about the Federal Republic's limited use of Good Design for economic purposes to enhance the national prestige of its production, Gropius warned that Germany was making an enormous mistake: "More than ever, I am convinced that the solution to cultural-political questions touched upon by design belong at the center of public interest, not the periphery." After all, design movements such as the Deutscher Werkbund and the Bauhaus had once instituted German leadership in modernist, socially conscious aesthetics. Convinced that "the Bauhaus tradition has been appraised inaccurately" by the political and cultural elites in Germany, the Bauhaus founder identified "a lack of connections to power figures in government and economy after the War" as the real reason for this negligence.²⁸

While personally invested in the debate about German cultural identity, the expatriate Gropius could not have been farther off the mark with his evaluation of industrial design in Germany. After the end of the Second World War, Germans created a new, democratic society particularly by drawing on their cultural resources of the pre- and interwar periods. One area in Germany's cultural reconstruction that received much attention due to pressing demands for housing, and consequently furniture, was interior

²⁸ Walter Gropius to Karl Schiller, 18 December 1967, B102/207796, Bundesarchiv Koblenz [hereafter referred to as BAK].

design. The combination of scarce materials and the dire economic situation of the immediate postwar years made economical production mandatory and placed design at the center of the government's political and economic considerations.²⁹ Required to use resources more efficiently, officials looked for institutional solutions to forge greater coherence among the different participants in the production and consumption processes. Cultural and political elites developed the idea of institutions that would professionalize designers, acquaint producers with the merits of quality design, and educate consumers in questions of style and taste to create the “right” demand. Contrary to Gropius’ assertion, design specialists of the interwar years, the members of the Werkbund and Bauhaus in particular, pioneered the process of aesthetic reinvention on the political and the educational level. Moreover, the aesthetic, utilitarian philosophy of interwar modernism served as a point of reference, both as an aspired ideal and a rejected foil, which framed the German reconstruction effort (see figure 1).

What happened during this period of design institutionalization in the years 1945 to 1967 that led Gropius to assume that postwar Germany had light-heartedly passed up the legacy of Bauhaus modernism? To answer this question this chapter follows debates evolving around the politicization of aesthetics as well as their institutionalization in East and West Germany from a comparative perspective. Looking at interlinking domestic and international tensions in postwar culture and politics, this chapter explores the conception

²⁹ It should be noted that the postwar economic situation developed differently in east and west. Part of the reason being the differing extent of reparations taken by the Allies and the Soviet Union, varying results of socialism and capitalism as well as the positive effects of the Marshall Plan in the Federal Republic. See Greg Castillo, “Exhibiting the Good Life: Marshall Plan Modernism in Divided Berlin,” in *Cold War Modern: Art and Design in a Divided World, 1945-1975*, ed. David Crowley and Jane Pavett (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 2008); Jonathan Zatlin, *The Currency of Socialism: Money and Political Culture in East Germany* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

of the West German design council Rat für Formgebung and the East German Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung, as well as its predecessors. It will become clear that more was at stake than the most economical re-building of the two German states. Rather, these debates illustrate the cultural and political reconfiguration of two divergent German political systems, marred by their National Socialist past, whose attempts at rehabilitation extended from the public sphere all the way into the homes of the population. While much research has been done on similar themes from separate national sides, the comparison adds an analytical layer that uncovers the ideological underpinnings of postwar interior design in the context of the open German Question. As a unified future moved out of reach, the two German states explored diverging aesthetic options to develop identities for their part of the country. In dealing with the Nazi legacy, the process resulted in different structures of state organization on the one hand and cultural philosophies on the other. The comparison between East and West can thus further our understanding of how political and structural differences influenced the ability of modernism's disciples to realize their vision of post-fascist modernity in democratic and socialist societies.

While this chapter tells an economic-cultural story that connects the two postwar Germanys, it casts the net of German aesthetic re-civilization wider to illuminate the international context in which this took place. Swedish and British state design institutions inspired the German institutionalization of design, a novelty in German government structure. Especially the British example served as a point of reference for both the West German Rat für Formgebung and the East German Amt für Formgestaltung. Dedicated to quality control, consumer education, and national

trademark promotion, these institutions were decisive in shaping a cohesive aesthetic for their national design and projecting a modern image abroad.³⁰ In 1944, Britain established the Council of Industrial Design “to promote by all practicable means the improvement of design in the products of British industry,” taking advantage of a material new beginning during reconstruction.³¹ Facing similar challenges in turning a war economy to peacetime production, the parallels with Britain influenced the German institutionalization of industrial design. On the other hand, in both parts of Germany the occupiers hampered the development of pronounced German designs as both the Americans and the Soviets tried to envelop their part of Germany culturally into their sphere of influence. Throughout the reconstruction period, the reception of American and Soviet influences remained contentious. While the critique of Americanization in West Germany became part of cultural debates, in the East open criticism of Sovietization remained rare. Instead the GDR explored its socialist culture with consistent reliance on its national cultural heritage. Benefitting from other national examples, yet pushing against external forces, both Germanys used material culture to navigate their way out of the long shadow of the Third Reich.

³⁰ The first national design council, the Swedish Society for Industrial Design, was founded in 1845 to safeguard the quality of Swedish hand-made crafts and “to counter the perceived threat from industrial mass production and from the poor quality products made by craftsmen who were not trained by the guilds.” In the early twentieth century, the Society accepted the predominance of industrial goods and thereafter sought to guide industrial fabrication towards more beautiful everyday wares that did not imitate older luxury. Instead, it provided Sweden’s growing working class with inexpensive, but high-quality goods. Svensk Form “How it all started,” <http://www.svenskform.se/english/> accessed on July 10, 2008.

³¹ Design Council, “Our history,” <http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/en/Design-Council/1/Our-history/> accessed on July 10, 2008. On the constitution and immediate postwar activism of the Council of industrial Design see Patrick J. Maguire and Jonathan M. Woodham, eds., *Design and Cultural Politics in Post-War Britain: The Britain Can Make It Exhibition of 1946* (London and Washington: Leicester University Press, 1997).

The Long Shadow of National Socialism: Reinterpreting German Modernism

In contrast to painting or representative architecture, the Nazis never fully coordinated the field of industrial design. Instead, the Third Reich integrated Weimar modernism into its reactionary politics by instilling it with new meaning.³² In terms of aesthetics, industrial design in Germany did not change very much from 1925 to 1965, “what did change [...] was the cultural meaning and representation of design, as the very same objects were embraced by dramatically incongruous political regimes as visual markers of their specific political projects.”³³ This emphasis on aesthetic continuity opens up a myriad of analytical avenues, which warrant exploration: how did this continuity shape postwar relationship between politics and design, between people and things, and, last but not least, between the two German states? All these arenas were highly influenced by the activism of the East and West German political and cultural elites who, in contrast to Gropius’ assertions, molded Germany’s post-fascist culture specifically against the backdrop of Weimar’s classical modernism.

De-Nazification constituted one of the most important factors shaping the aesthetic culture that emerged after 1945.³⁴ In a turn away from the visual politics of fascism that emphasized the aestheticization of the relationship between people in the

³² The politicization of art reached new dimensions under National Socialism. Among the works that discuss artistic expression during the Third Reich are Eric Michaud, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany*, translated by Janet Lloyd (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004 [1996]); Richard Golsan, ed. *Fascism, Aesthetics, and Culture* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1992); Peter Adam, *Art of the Third Reich* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1992); Stephanie Barron, ed. *Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi-Germany* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum, 1991); and Brandon Taylor and Winfried van der Will, eds. *The Nazification of Art: Art, Design, Music, Architecture, and Film in the Third Reich* (Winchester, Eng.: Winchester Press, 1990).

³³ Paul Betts, *Authority of Everyday Objects: A Cultural History of West German Industrial Design* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 11.

³⁴ The other three factors that Betts identifies as shaping German postwar design are economics, cultural idealism after the war, and the value of industrial design as diplomatic capital. Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects*, 9-17.

public arena, such as Albert Speer's grandiose productions for NSDAP mass rallies, the post-fascist campaign to aestheticize the relations between people and things focused on the private sphere.³⁵ In an effort to overcome the administrative and economic divisions, both the eastern and western zones of Germany encouraged the institutionalization of design with the deliberate goal of maintaining a unified cultural identity. Personal networks of architects and designers reconnected to work on the cultural reorganization of Germany after the abyss of the Third Reich. Many of them had been students of the Bauhaus or members of professional organizations, such as the Deutscher Werkbund, an association of artists and esthete industrialists founded in 1907 with a long tradition of involvement in German cultural politics.³⁶

The Werkbund of the pre- and interwar years adopted the European turn-of-the-century trend towards "social aesthetics" as the association's cause. In order to realize their vision for the age of mechanization, Werkbund members, theorists and practitioners alike, looked to reconcile industrial production (standardization) and design (spiritualization) in aesthetic, social and economic regards. In accord with contemporary debates about the virtues and vices of production mechanization, the Werkbund contemplated how design should adapt to industrialization, which was generally perceived as a threat to traditional craftsmanship and the cultural value of goods. However, they also stood against the, by then considered backwards looking, Arts and Crafts principles: "Unnecessary ornament was avoided, and the quality of objectivity could be achieved through adopting a rational approach to form-giving, guided by the

³⁵ Herbert Steinwarz, *Wesen, Aufgaben, Ziele des Amtes Schönheit der Arbeit* (Berlin: 1937), 5-6.

³⁶ For a detailed account of the Werkbund from its founding to the Third Reich see Joan Campbell, *The German Werkbund: The Politics of Reform in the Applied Arts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

requirements of engineering and technology, which were deeply respected.”³⁷ Debates about the aesthetics of mechanization resulted in the rationalization of industrial shapes. In later years, the *credo* “form follows function” united the Bauhaus with these Werkbund ideas.³⁸ Emphasizing the use of quality materials and simple, functional shapes, the association promoted the concept of Good Design (*Gute Form*) as a middle ground to introduce a material culture of modern everyday objects.³⁹

The initial idea that encouraged the creation of the Werkbund was closely connected to fears of German cultural and economic demise. In reaction to the late nineteenth-century British disdain for German wares — the label “Made in Germany” was first introduced with Britain’s 1887 Merchandise Marks Act to warn English consumers of German low-quality products⁴⁰ — the prevention of kitsch became a guiding thought in the aesthetic reform movements of the early twentieth century.⁴¹ The

³⁷ Jeremy Aynsley, *Designing Modern Germany* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 50.

³⁸ The complex history and legacy of the Bauhaus cannot be considered here, but a myriad of works focusing on the avant-garde of Weimar’s Bauhaus has been published in the past four decades. Founded by Walter Gropius in 1919, Bauhaus has become synonymous with German modernity in architecture, photography, painting, and product design. See Wulf Herzogenrath, “Zur Rezeption des Bauhauses,” in *Beiträge zur Rezeption der Kunst des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*. Studien zur Kunst des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts 29, ed. Wulf Schadendorf, 129-141 (Munich: Prestel, 1975). Christina Biundo and others’ bibliography *Bauhaus-Ideen 1919-1994. Bibliographie und Beiträge zur Rezeption des Bauhausgedankens* (Berlin: Reimer, 1994) provides an overview of the Bauhaus literature and sources up to its publishing date.

³⁹ The fact that the Werkbund movement was highly influential to the German-speaking world is evidenced by the founding of the Austrian Werkbund in 1912 and the Swiss Werkbund in 1913. Its influence was even felt beyond continental Europe. A visit to the 1914 Werkbund exhibition inspired British designers to form the Design and Industries Association.

⁴⁰ Maiken Umbach, “Made in Germany,” in *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte II*, ed. Etienne Francois and Hagen Schulze (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2001): 407.

⁴¹ “Kitsch” as a critical concept originated in the nineteenth century. In reaction to Romanticism in literature and painting, cultural critics increasingly warned about the overuse of sensitivity in artistic expression. With the rise of aesthetic education in the early twentieth century, criticism gave kitsch a pejorative meaning of cheapness and ingenuousness. In the interwar years, kitsch became associated with cultural crisis and social decay. Ernst Broch, who shaped this discourse in the field of literature decisively, understands kitsch to be dishonest and dismantles it as a beautiful illusion that betrays the audience. After 1945, this conception of kitsch continued to influence aesthetic discourse and education. Walter Benjamin wrote about “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” that the object loses its authenticity, which he understands to be the essence of things, by substituting a plurality of copies for a unique existence. These copies can be put “into situations which would be out of reach for the original

Werkbund's approach to the kitsch problem focused on a correct use of resources that rejected the unnatural, the pretentious, and the overly ornamented in both materials and form.⁴² Products manufactured to look like something else, for example a cheap clear plastic vase that is made to look like an expensive crystal vase, would fall into the Werkbund concept of kitsch. However, the movement realized that enterprises would not change their successful production patterns until the consumers would demand high-quality products and, accordingly, Werkbund members concentrated their efforts of taste education on the consuming population. Such sociological approach to kitsch prevention, though, necessitated its adaptation to the ruling social order and economic system. While the underlying aesthetic principles did not change much between the 1920s to the 1960s, Germany's tumultuous history in the first half of the twentieth century continuously affected the political environment in which the Werkbund operated.

In order to fully appreciate the Werkbund's ability to adapt their cultural concepts to the ideological needs of the respective leaderships, this period of changing political environments warrants closer examination. In the pre-1914 context of the empire, the Werkbund emphasized the moral and educational value of everyday objects. In particular leftists among the Werkbund members envisioned a social reconstitution of everything "from the spoon to the city."⁴³ The post-WWI era saw an expansion and radicalization of design conceptions, which came to the forefront particularly in urban planning and public

itself." Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 220-221. Displacement or unintended use of things create kitsch. For example, copies of design furniture decorated with porcelain knick-knacks in a petit bourgeois living room presents a problem of high culture appropriation. For an overview of the kitsch debate over the course of two centuries see Ute Dettmar and Thomas Küpper, *Kitsch: Texte und Theorien* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 2007).

⁴² Gustav Edmund Pazaurek, *Guter und schlechter Geschmack im Kunstgewerbe* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags Anstalt, 1912).

⁴³ Mark Jarzombek, "The *Kunstgewerbe*, the *Werkbund*, and the Aesthetics of Culture in the Wilhelmine Period," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 53, no. 1 (1994): 8.

housing. “Neues Bauen” in Frankfurt and the 1927 Weissenhofsiedlung in Stuttgart remain the most consistent testimony to this period of state and municipal funded design. The Depression abruptly ended state support in 1929, leaving many ideas for the industrial age unexplored, and the Werkbund henceforth had to struggle with its association to the vision of failed industrialism. Modern architecture stalled, but a softened Bauhaus modernism became successful after 1929 in the new machine aesthetic in everyday objects.⁴⁴ The commercialization of modern design had a negative effect on the social grounding of modernism as it “went hand in hand with the disappearance of its former reform idealism. The once powerful political pathos of functionalism had given way to a severe Neue Sachlichkeit divorced from any real social vision.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, the movement came under crossfire both from the political left and right. Throughout the Weimar Republic, the Werkbund ideals for industrial modernism presented a provocation to cultural conservatives who feared that industrialization would do away with distinctly German culture. On the left, radical Marxist condemned Werkbund elitism as detached from the masses, wasting their talents on designing luxuries.⁴⁶ With the Nazi seizure of power, the Werkbund ceased to exist as a private association and was brought first under the jurisdiction of Goebbel’s Reich Chamber of the Visual Arts (*Reichskammer der bildenden Künste*) and later under that of the Reich Chamber of Culture (*Reichskulturkammer*).⁴⁷ Contrary to their different political outlook, Werkbund

⁴⁴ Paul Betts provides an insightful analyses of Weimar aesthetics in the first chapter of *The Authority of Everyday Objects*.

⁴⁵ Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects*, 30.

⁴⁶ Campbell, *The Werkbund*, 224-226.

⁴⁷ Joan Campbell finds that the Werkbund leaders Ernst Jäckh and Peolzig tried to work the Nazi machinery and appease the party structures in order to maintain control over the Gleichschaltungsprozess (coordination process). Nevertheless, by the fall of 1933 the Werkbund had completely come under the domination of the Nazi state.

industrial modernism and Nazi culture, despite its agricultural “blood and soil” ideology, proved to be compatible at least in the realm of industry, rationalization, and propaganda.⁴⁸

Werkbund members continued their aesthetic mission under Nazi rule, at least until 1939 when the war put a halt to the Werkbund ideal of quality work.⁴⁹ Especially the struggle against kitsch, which was directed against Nazi paraphernalia in the name of a more dignified German material culture, presented a rich field of work for taste reformers in the Third Reich.⁵⁰ While the Nazis thus controlled the commercial exploit of their political symbols, they re-appropriated leftist aesthetics of *Neue Sachlichkeit* for their own goals, especially in the work environment. With Alfred Speer’s *Beauty of Labor* (*Schönheit der Arbeit*) program, the Werkbund goals were turned on their head: instead of the ennoblement of the worker, the aesthetic restructuring of the workplace now adjusted the worker to the repressive labor system in factories.⁵¹ The resulting aesthetic was a softened version of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, a Nazi modernism that emphasized technological advancement and functionality with the ultimate aim of increasing productivity in preparation for war.⁵²

⁴⁸ Nazism’s cooption of modernism has been discussed by numerous authors, see for example Andrew Hewitt, *Fascist Modernism: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (Stanford: University of Stanford Press, 1993). For an overview of the debate see the essay of Winfried Nerdinger, “Modernisierung: Bauhaus Nationalsozialismus,” *Bauhaus-Moderne im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Andrew Hewitt (Munich: Prestel, 1993): 9-23.

⁴⁹ Sabine Weißler, ed. *Design in Deutschland 1933-45* (Gießen: Anabas, 1990).

⁵⁰ Rolf Steinberg, ed., *Nazi-Kitsch* (Darmstadt: Melzer, 1975), 6; Campbell, *The Werkbund*, 278.

⁵¹ Anson G. Rabinbach, “The Aesthetics of Production in the Third Reich,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 11, no. 4, *Theories of Fascism* (1976): 44.

⁵² Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects*, 41.

It was this corporative and aesthetic legacy then, against which the Werkbund had to reconstitute the movement after the Second World War.⁵³ Indeed, its problematic involvement with the Nazi regime was something that the Werkbund desired to leave in the past. The *tabula rasa* of devastated and bombed-out cities of the Second World War offered the Werkbund a new beginning and manifold opportunities for imprinting its principles into the new material culture. During the years of want, the Werkbund reconnected with its original moral and social vision, but transplanted it into a more industrialized and globalized postwar era. An educational impetus as well as a purpose-oriented aesthetic mission drove this reform movement, which meant a certain revival of Weimar modernism.⁵⁴

Reconstruction Design in the two German States

Immediately after the war, the Werkbund re-established itself in regional groups in the eastern and western occupation zones in cities like Dresden, East and West Berlin, Düsseldorf, and Stuttgart. The association quickly gained official recognition with the western authorities. By the summer of 1948, regional governments subsidized the Werkbund group *West-Nord* with 10,000 DM annually and the Bavarian cultural ministry gave its regional DWB group considerably more with 60,000 DM per year.⁵⁵ The regional administration's subsidies signify an acknowledgement of design as part of the

⁵³ The 1933 closing of the Bauhaus by the Nazis and the resulting emigration of most Bauhaus teachers provided the Bauhaus legacy with a clean slate vis-à-vis collaborative allegations. Accordingly, "Bauhaus modernism" carried an anti-fascist connotation rendering it a 'safer' reference point in public debates to communicate modern visions for postwar Germany. For more details on the Werkbund's work during the Third Reich see the first chapter of Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects*, 23-72.

⁵⁴ Christopher Oestereich, "*Gute Form*" im Wiederaufbau: *Zur Geschichte der Produktgestaltung in Westdeutschland nach 1945* (Berlin: Lukas, 2000), 23.

⁵⁵ Oestereich, "*Gute Form*" im Wiederaufbau, 267.

reconstruction effort and illustrate an early flirtation with modernist aesthetics in the West. This regional cooperation moreover considerably facilitated the Werkbund's later involvement in the foundation of a West German design council that would continue the movement's mission to prevent the production of kitsch and to continuously educate the consumer about the "right" consumption.

Soon thereafter, the Werkbund started its bids for aesthetic leadership in the Federal Republic with two domestic culture exhibitions put on in Cologne in 1949. *New Dwelling (Neues Wohnen)* and *New Architecture since 1945 (Neue Architektur seit 1945)* showed modernist solutions for the bombed-out cities in Germany's west that design historian Jeremy Aynsley describes as "prescriptive visions of design ideals."⁵⁶ "[The exhibitions] were strongly influenced by developments in Scandinavia, Switzerland and the United States since 1933," but with its reliance on abstraction for the organization of products in the displays, they still represented powerfully Werkbund ideals.⁵⁷ Promoting pure minimalism in furnishings, *New Dwelling* prescribed Germans modesty in their consumer behavior based on moral choice and collective commitment to counter the corrupting influence of materialism based on false abundance or pretentious ornamentation.⁵⁸ Right away, the Werkbund tied its tradition of taste education (*Geschmacksbildung*) in with their struggle against kitsch and its implications for social decay in postwar Germany.⁵⁹ Photographs from this exhibition show multi-functional room settings that no other term than "empty" could describe better. This asceticism

⁵⁶ Aynsley, *Designing Modern Germany*, 151.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 7-8.

⁵⁹ Katrin Pallowski, "Zur Kontinuität der 'klassischen Moderne' in den 50er Jahren," in *Design in Deutschland 1933-45*, ed. Sabine Weißler (Gießen: Anabas, 1990): 133-134.

stemmed from the poor state of the German economy, underscored by a product range that started with furniture dating back several decades to hardly finished prototypes, as well as the Werkbund's renewed endeavor to lead in the invention of socially responsible aesthetics. A placard with the words "Werkbund is no Luxury" (*Werkbund ist kein Luxus*) advertised a new outlook on the failed interwar mission: to make affordable Good Design products for the masses.⁶⁰

At the same time, the eastern Werkbund increasingly lost its political influence with the centralization of politics in the Soviet zone of occupation. The Soviet Military Administration's (SVAG) installed exclusive political leadership with the Socialist Unity Party as early as 1946.⁶¹ Irritated by the following coercive centralization of most cultural fields, prominent Werkbund members such as industrial designer Wilhelm Wagenfeld in East Berlin and architect Egon Eiermann in Dresden moved to the West. Yet others committed to the Werkbund and Bauhaus principles with stronger social(ist) ideals, such as industrial designers Mart Stam and Horst Michel as well as the architect Selman Selmanagic, remained in the eastern zone.⁶² The SVAG opened schools for the education of designers, beginning with the Weimar University for Architecture and the Arts in 1946. Weimar, significant as the location of the first Bauhaus school, remained a gravitation center for artists, architects, and designers after the Second World War. Horst Michel, educated at the Berlin University for the Arts and an experienced member of

⁶⁰ For a detailed description of the exhibition and the reactions to it see Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, 7-8.

⁶¹ With the help of the Soviet occupiers, the Communist Party forced a merger with the Social Democratic Party in the eastern zone of occupation in April 1946.

⁶² For a detailed account of Soviet cultural occupation policy between 1945 and 1949 see Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*.

architect and interior designer Bruno Paul's studio,⁶³ started an industrial design program in Weimar in response to the deprived population's material needs. Provincial Weimar was the perfect location to reconstitute East Germany's material culture as it afforded Michel and the school with close ties to the local industries.⁶⁴

In contrast to his West German counterparts who experienced practically unlimited possibilities in their approach to industrial design, Michel's work increasingly became circumscribed by socialist ideology and constraints of nascent political centralization. The challenge lay in materially expressing the immaterial virtues of socialism, which, Michel recognized, entailed not only the aesthetic education of designers in order to influence production, but also that of consumers to create the right demand for a socialist domestic environment. In Michel's eyes, durability, honesty, effective use of materials, reduced storage and transportation costs, and the avoidance of moral decay and pretension of value appreciation via "unauthentic" materials or embellished surfaces marked good socialist design.⁶⁵ These qualities fit perfectly with the GDR's plans for industrialization of the crafts in large-scale serial production. At the same time, they aimed at preventing kitsch. Yet herein lay Michel's problem, because like other twentieth-century cultural critics, Michel blamed kitsch as a cultural phenomenon on industrialization and mass production. The goal was to facilitate a

⁶³ Bruno Paul's furniture figures are among the most prominent works of German Art Nouveau at the turn of the century. Shortly thereafter, Paul became one of the driving members behind the *Deutscher Werkbund*. The *Werkbund* was founded in 1907 as an association of artists and producers who shared an aesthetic preference for functionalist, "Good Design," which the association promoted via exhibitions, competitions, and publications until the NS-regime absorbed it into its cultural organizations in 1933. On the founding of the *Werkbund* see Oestereich, "*Gute Form*" im Wiederaufbau, 53-55.

⁶⁴ Petra Eisele, "Ist Geschmack Glücksache? Horst Michel und das Weimarer Institut für Innengestaltung," in *Horst Michel – DDR-Design. Tagungsband zum Kolloquium*, ed. Eisele, Petra and Siegfried Gronert (Weimar: Universitätsverlag, 2004), 27.

⁶⁵ Handwritten notes, *Horst Michel*, 20 November 1984, Box "AIF Diverses ungeordnet," Sammlung industrielle Gestaltung [hereafter referred to as SiG].

product landscape that would uplift Germans' defeated spirits and destroyed homes, while circumventing the seemingly unavoidable implications for social and moral decay. Michel faced the struggle against kitsch in mass production head-on, working with the Thuringia Chamber of Crafts to improve production in regard to aesthetics and efficiency as soon as 1946. His experience in arts and crafts made him an expert in household and interior design. With the cooperation of local companies, he assembled household wares and ceramics in large shows that a jury evaluated to create criteria for "good design". This practice continued in later years during standardization and *Sortimentsbereinigung*, an effort to reduce the number of models for a given product to increase Plan efficiency and industrial output.

Anticipating the GDR economic motto "if only good is produced, nothing bad can be sold" of later decades, Michel drafted a "Law Against the Exploitation of the People by Kitsch" and introduced it into the Thuringia regional parliament in 1947.⁶⁶ This Kitsch bill expressed Michel's conviction that political action was needed to prevent severe damage to the economy:

It seems to be necessary to fight increasingly rampant kitsch and its inherent waste of resources at the level of the state and to influence the quality of products from crafts and industry. The multiplicity of shapes, more or less resulting from financial greed, the amassing of dishonest pomp on appliances of the everyday and basic commodities, as well as the wasting of resources mean an exploitation of the people and dissipation of the people's wealth.⁶⁷

Kitsch seen from Michel's point of view embodied the reverse of socialist ideals, a complex concept of profit-induced diversity that differs from today's pedestrian perceptions of kitsch.

⁶⁶ See Heinz Hirdina, *Gestalten für die Serie* (Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1988), 216; Ronald Stade, "Designs of Identity: Politics of Aesthetics in the GDR," *Ethnos* 58, no. 3/4 (1993): 245.

⁶⁷ Law quoted in Eisele, "Ist Geschmack Glücksache?" 27.

While the Kitsch bill never passed, Michel successfully introduced a quality seal for crafts and applied arts in Thuringia, a white lily and hammer in a blue circle. Soon thereafter the seal helped consumers across East German territory to differentiate between good and bad design. Retail recognized the merits of the seal and priced the awarded products higher, which in turn created incentives for industry and crafts to produce better products. Starting in 1949, Michel and the Weimar Institute organized several “Kitsch Exhibitions” to educate the broader public through comparison of well and badly designed products.⁶⁸ These early episodes illustrate Michel’s involvement in such ideological and political debates about production and kitsch even before the official founding of the German Democratic Republic. Moreover, his tactics continuously aligned with the Werkbund’s aesthetic and educational principles, providing ties across the political division into East and West. Pioneering a functional and modern aesthetic that corresponded to the limited resources available in the postwar years, Michel had become a design authority who greatly influenced developments in design education, the economy, and even politics. While his take on socialist essentialism aligned with economic policy, on closer examination, however, his aesthetic sensitivities went in the opposite direction of official aesthetic development under Soviet influence, which soon diminished his leadership.

Between 1946 and 1948, the Soviet Military Administration worked towards the centralization of cultural politics in the eastern zone of occupation in cooperation with its German partners.⁶⁹ With the centralization effort, the SED hoped to ensure uniformity in

⁶⁸ Handwritten notes, “Horst Michel,” 20 November 1984. Box “Diverses AIF ungeordnet,” SiG.

⁶⁹ Richtlinien für die Kulturabteilungen der SED,” 15 June 1946, in *Politik und Kultur in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands (SBZ), 1945-1949*, ed. Gerd Dietrich (Berlin: Peter Lang, 1993), 254-255;

the political reorganization process that accompanied the growing German division. By May 1948 the SED announced an all-encompassing claim to cultural leadership at the Party's *Kulturtag*: "The Culture Conference has expressed the decisive cultural will of the Party. It has illustrated the character of the Party as a party of culture [*Kulturpartei*] in the broadest sense of the word as well as the leading intellectual force in Germany's democratic reconstruction."⁷⁰ Henceforth, principles of party control rather than artistic and aesthetic concerns guided East German cultural and educational policies. Such politicization of culture differed distinctly from West Germany's more liberal and decentralized conception of cultural responsibility. Until this day, cultural matters are handled at the regional level in Germany; there has never been a Ministry of Culture in the Federal Republic. Consequently, the *Kulturtag* hailed the end of any assumed or aspired cultural unity between East and West. Extending the political division of Germany, the decision to pursue a "socialist" culture in the eastern zone of occupation allowed the SED to model its part of Germany in accordance with the Soviet example and in contrast to the cultural fabric of the Federal Republic. In turn, these contrasting approaches to cultural policy set the stage for similarly divergent national aesthetics in East and West during the reconstruction period.

Separate Economies, Separate Aesthetics

The nascent political and cultural division between East and West increased when the Western Allies took measures to solidify the war-damaged German economy that

and "EntschlieÙung zur Kulturpolitik, angenommen vom Ersten Kulturtag der SED in Berlin," 7 May 1948," *ibid.*, 310-314.

⁷⁰ "Schreiben der Abteilung Parteischulung, Kultur und Erziehung beim Zentralsekretariat an die Landes- und Kreisvorstände der SED," May 1948, *ibid.*, 315-320.

reparation payments had scarred even further. The Marshall Plan and the resultant currency reform of 1948 cemented the separation by creating two German economies that fell into dramatically different economic systems: capitalism in the West and socialism in the East. Acting against the provisions for Germany's economic unity at the Potsdam conference, Britain, France, and the United States merged their occupation zones and treated this territory of the so-called Trizone as a single economic unit while at the same time deliberately excluding the Soviet zone of occupation. The Yalta and Potsdam agreements between the U.S., the Soviet Union, Britain, and France had put Germany under their joined control until a peace treaty was reached, but its *de facto* split into two different countries with opposing ideologies and separate state apparatus complicated reaching a consensus concerning German matters and the status of Berlin.⁷¹ Eventually, the Soviet blockade of Berlin between June 1948 and May 1949 effectively foreclosed Allied cooperation in Germany. Moreover, these events weakened hopes for a unified future, leaving Germany to emerge as the ideological battleground of the superpowers. As a result of the increasing divide, the two German states focused on developing diverging social and political systems that increasingly sought to demarcate from each other.

When East Germany achieved statehood as the German Democratic Republic in the midst of heightening Cold War tensions in the fall of 1949, cultural delineation from

⁷¹ See Wilfried Loth, *Stalin's Unwanted Child: The Soviet Union, the German Question, and the Founding of the GDR*. Translated by Robert F. Hogg (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press; New York, N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 1998); Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*; Ronald J. Granieri, *The Ambivalent Alliance: Konrad Adenauer, the CDU/CSU, and the West, 1949-1966* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003); William Glenn Gray, *Germany's Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949-1969* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Konrad Jarausch and Hannes Siegrist, ed., *Amerikanisierung und Sowjetisierung in Deutschland, 1945-1970* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1997) for a discussions of 1949 and the resulting German-German competition for national legitimacy and international recognition.

the West became an ideological concern in developing a distinct national profile. Such process of state formation included the socialist remaking of society and all its underlying structures. Toward these ends, early state socialism and its artistic proponents provided a comprehensive approach to the human environment: new ways of feeling, thinking and living specific to the working class had to be created.⁷² In the early 1920s, a Soviet avant-garde movement known under the name “Constructivists” shifted their interest from art for art’s sake to an active engagement in processes of socio-political restructuring inspired by the goals of the Bolshevik Revolution. During the first years under Soviet control, their ambition went beyond simply turning artistic projects into political messages. Rather, the Constructivists created a specific type of artistic-political discourse in which every decision regarding the aesthetic construction of art became a political one.⁷³

Constructivist cultural expression allowed for the aesthetic visualization of the utopian socialist project, yet it further served as a way to communicate to the Soviet population its new relation to things in the realms of production and consumption. In her study of Constructivism’s most prolific phase between 1923 and 1925, Christina Kiaer shows that the avant-garde’s devotion to “reintegrating art into the life process” and regaining “social use value for art” by creating democratic objects for the everyday.⁷⁴ Their emphasis thus lay more on integration of art into the everyday than domination over the everyday – a clearly functionalist perspective. The aspired artistic production, as

⁷² Antonio Gramsci, “Questions of Culture,” in *Selections from Cultural Writings*, ed. by David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, trans. by William Boelhower (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 41. [Originally published in *Avanti!*, Piedmont edition, 14 June 1920].

⁷³ Boris Groys, *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin: Die gespaltene Kultur in der Sowjetunion* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1988), 27.

⁷⁴ Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005), 4.

the avant-garde theorist Osip Brik explained, meant to express “the conscious creative relationship to the productive process. We would like every worker who gives an object a particular form and color to understand why that form and color is necessary.”⁷⁵ Although the Constructivist projects paved the way for politicized art in socialism, they were less successful in implementing their vision of this new way of life and materiality. The problem was perhaps that their radical avant-garde idea of the socialist New Man resembled more a utopian work-machine than a human being, or that their Bolshevik negation of individual possession overreached human possibility. In the end, the Constructivist bond between politics and culture remained, yet the carefully crafted relationship between art and the everyday was replaced by an aesthetic remodeling of material culture that favored form over function.

Artistic expression under Stalin rediscovered human emotions and reintroduced them into the productive process.⁷⁶ Boris Groys describes Socialist Realist art as the means to recognize reality, or the utopian Soviet reality that was to be created. The artistic conception of production lost its centrality, and instead the ways of utilization and the attitude towards the productive means gained importance under cultural Stalinism.⁷⁷ The direct connection between form and function dissolved, and with it disappeared the avant-garde ideas of the Constructivists. In contrast to the earlier negation of personal possessions, Socialist Realist architecture explored its extremes, achieving monumental,

⁷⁵ Osip Brik quoted in Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 159.

⁷⁶ The emotionality of cultural Stalinism is especially evident in literature, as Katerina Clark has skillfully illustrated in her work on the ritualistic Socialist Realist novel. Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History and Ritual* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000 [1981]). For more information about the role of human emotions in socialist thought turn to Derek Müller, “Das Menschenbild im Stalinismus,” *Der Topos des Neuen Menschen in der russischen und sowjetrussischen Geistesgeschichte*, 220 – 246 (Bern: Peter Lang, 1998).

⁷⁷ Groys, *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin*, 56-57.

heavily ornamented, and pompous aesthetics.⁷⁸ The furniture inside these buildings invoked bourgeois styles such as *Biedermeier*, adding a cozy feeling to the interiors of the revolution. Instead of integrating art into the everyday, art came to dominate the everyday. And the artist became the *locus* of this process since cultural Stalinism understood design to express his inner reality, “his ability to inwardly identify with the Party’s and Stalin’s volition, to amalgamate with it and to create an image or, more exactly, a model of this willed reality [...]”⁷⁹ According to Groys, it was the Socialist Realist artist’s task to develop the utopian dream of the avant-garde with “non-avant-garde, traditional, ‘realistic’ means.”⁸⁰ Aesthetic expressions were meant to act upon the New Man in his evolution toward revolutionary consciousness. Art and the material environment therefore played an important role in the education of the socialist individual and the creation of collective socialist identity. Similarly, the GDR arrived at such juncture in its revolutionary development about twenty-five years later, but the outcome of its cultural quest was predetermined by the Soviet example.

With the Soviet Union as an ideological foil, the leadership of the SED modeled itself and most aspects of the East German state after the Stalinist dictatorship. During the years of occupation, as Norman Naimark illustrates, the SVAG demanded German recognition of Soviet cultural superiority.⁸¹ The SED thus continued the political and cultural work that the Soviets had begun in 1945 in constructing the first communist German state. While Soviet influence in the East remained considerable after 1949, East

⁷⁸ Derek Müller called the style of Socialist Realist culture “pathetic, heroic, and neo-classical.” Müller, “Das Menschenbild im Stalinismus,” 234.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 59.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 81.

⁸¹ See Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*.

Germans increasingly commanded their own state apparatus and decision-making, at least in regard to domestic policies. Consequently, the SED government faced the task of creating the parameters of a German socialist culture, which not only encompassed high culture forms of the arts in literature, painting, and music, but also the culture of everyday life. Industrial design, at the crossroads of applied arts and economic planning, as the environmental manifestation of socialist thought, became part of this aesthetic reinvention. Partially in reaction to these centralized efforts of cultural reconstruction in the East, the Federal Republic continued and fortified its endeavor of rebuilding the country. Western pluralism, meanwhile, included interest groups representing political factions, business elites as well as the population, into the state-building process. This associational culture (*Verbandskultur*), however, quickly succeeded at turning the tables, making the institutionalizing of industrial design a governmental responsibility.⁸²

The Werkbund, a well-connected representative of West German associational politics, set to work with its lobbying with the two exhibitions in 1949. Not only did the “Neues Wohnen” and the “Neue Architektur seit 1945” shows educate consumers in Cologne, they also made officials increasingly aware of the economic potential in promoting a modern aesthetic nationwide. By supporting this exhibition effort, the Economic Administration for the Tri-Zone officially embraced the Werkbund.⁸³ Such a structural transfer of cultural responsibilities from the regional administration to the central economic administration heralded the dawn of national solutions to problems of

⁸² *Verbandskultur*, also known as corporatism, is a facet of political culture, in which associations do the lobbying, and sometimes financing, for governmental programs, institutions, or laws. These associations usually represent members, multiple regions, states, or interest groups on the national level and serve the purpose of bundling influence. The Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie (Federation of German Industries) is a powerful example of privately organized business interest.

⁸³ Oesterreich, “*Gute Form*” im Wiederaufbau, 283.

Germany's postwar housing crisis, including fitted furniture for the limited spaces. Despite regional efforts, entire families often had to share one room where they would cook, eat, and sleep. Earlier that year, the Economic Administration had entered negotiations with the Werkbund about a "committee for design," but the plans had not come to fruition because of unsettled finances and an alleged lack of dedication on the part of the Werkbund. Nevertheless, Werkbund members publicly announced the idea for a national "council for industrial design" at their annual congress in June of 1949 in Cologne, emphasizing its claim to national leadership in material culture once more.⁸⁴ Because the occupation status limited political activity on the highest level, the realization of a council for industrial design hinged on the formation of the West German state as well as events that created a political necessity to act. Such motivation materialized with the growing reappearance of German products on the global market.

Along with the currency reform of 1948 came Germany's gradual international economic reintegration. Ready to contribute to the reconstruction of Europe and the development of international trade, West Germany longed to rekindle export relations. To test the waters, the Trizone participated in an industrial exhibition in New York in 1949. It was the first time since the Second World War that the occupiers granted German industrialists permission to present their products at an international event. While recent currency reform heralded the liberalization of the trizonal economy, international trade events such as the New York Germany 49 industry show offered a forum for communicating to the international community that West Germans now subscribed to

⁸⁴ Ibid., 284.

western capitalist principles and peaceful economic competition.⁸⁵ In the opening remarks to the exhibition catalogue, Ludwig Erhard, then the director of the Economic Administration of the Tri-Zonal Area of Germany, expressed his hope that the West German display would prove to the world that “the German people’s only desire today is to strive diligently for the improvement of human and social welfare and to show that they have kept their strength and ability for the accomplishment of this desire despite all the mistakes and the terror of the previous decade.”⁸⁶ It is interesting to note that Erhard downplayed the materialistic and capitalistic components of Germany’s participation in the fair. In doing so he missed an opportunity to establish a cultural bond with the West in general and the United States in particular based on shared attitudes toward trade and consumption. Instead he placed German economic recovery in a moral and social context, thus emphasizing the ethical importance for aesthetic reinvention. New German aesthetics should display industriousness and efficiency in the service of the common good, turning away from the pompous aesthetics connected to the public displays of National Socialism. Moreover, Erhard’s statement expressed the perhaps naïve sentiment among the West German political and economic elite that economic prosperity could replace, if not redeem, the vices of the Third Reich in public memory. In this way, politicians began to instill German products with symbolic meaning that went beyond

⁸⁵ See Mark E Spicka, *Selling the Economic Miracle: Economic Reconstruction and Politics in West Germany, 1949-1957* (New York: Berghahn, 2007), 3-5; Edgar Wolfrum, *Die geglückte Demokratie: Geschichte der Bundesrepublik von ihren Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2006), 75-77; Konrad Jarausch, *Die Umkehr: Deutsche Wandlungen 1945-1995* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2004), 117; Heinrich August Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen II: Deutsche Geschichte 1933-1990* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2005), 160-161; Axel Schildt, *Ankunft im Westen: Ein Essay zur Erfolgsgeschichte der Bundesrepublik* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer 1999), 49-86, for a selection of the literature on the 1948 currency reform and its effects on the West German economy.

⁸⁶ Catalog draft, Ludwig Erhard, “The Purpose of the German Industrial Exhibition in New York,” 25 January 1949, B 102/1964 Heft 1, BAK.

economic values. Erhard embraced these material promises for a better future and promoted them abroad as new West German virtues. He proposed that the New York exhibition displays served the express purpose of conveying the “honest work of German hands and minds.”⁸⁷ The German show participation in New York marked a watershed in strategy of cultural diplomacy, which was henceforth rooted in the belief that aesthetic quality was tantamount to moral transcendence that would yield external approval. These initial years of western economic activity coupled with a new morality laid the foundation for a West German democratic identity based on economic success, which came to fruition during the “economic miracle” of the late 1950s.

While the catalog presented the message of a re-civilized Germany in a clear language, materially the content of the New York displays failed to convince.⁸⁸ Unfortunately for Ludwig Erhard and West German industrialists, the industry exhibition proved not to be as successful as they had hoped. Furnished with curved, heavy recliners and an embellished display cabinet made of mahogany, the German exhibition received reviews that ranged from ridicule to outrage at what was regarded as impractical, pompous kitsch.⁸⁹ Insecure about what kind of aesthetic could best show Germans’ postwar attitudes, exhibitors relied on best-selling Bavarian arts and crafts and Louis XV-style furniture. Their spacious designs and extravagant use of materials, though, felt inappropriate amidst the postwar scarcity of resources and living space. Moreover, the

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Konrad Jarausch introduced the concept of recivilization, a depiction of four decades of German division as a constant struggle to instill the public and the political culture in both German states with lasting post-fascist ethical standards. While he does not treat artistic expression and material culture, these fields are indispensable for an analysis that seeks to connect the public to the private. See Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945-1995* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁸⁹ See Castillo for a verbatim excerpt from German émigré and Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) assistant curator Herwin Schaefer’s critique. Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, 34-35.

critique of West German material culture, Betts finds, “suggested a host of awkward impressions that West Germans desperately wanted to dispel: first, that West Germany remained culturally backward and/or arrogant; second, that it had made no cultural break with Nazism; and third, that it had inexplicably turned its back on its affirmative heritage of international modernism.”⁹⁰ Clearly, aesthetic recivilization as a holistic remake of the German cultural fabric warranted more organized approaches, now that there were external incentives to act on. The New York opprobrium further raised awareness for aesthetic considerations in product development among West Germany’s political and industrial elite, offering the Werkbund a vantage point for lobbying in industrial design.

Institutionalization in the West: Coordinating State and Business Interests

With the ratification of the Basic Law, West Germany achieved statehood as the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949, which ended the occupation status and enabled West Germans to politically organize themselves. Right away, the Werkbund began to work political channels to introduce concerns about national aesthetics into parliamentary debate. In October 1950, Werkbund member Heinrich König presented the organization’s plan for a national design council before the Bundestag Committee on Cultural Policy. Reminding the parliamentarians of the embarrassment at the New York exhibition, König connected Germany’s international reputation to domestic reconstruction needs: “Instead of handy, functional, and comfortable things to furnish the small apartments of public housing, producers offer heavy, pompous show-pieces of impractical arrangement.”

⁹⁰ Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects*, 179-180. Betts also provides a more in-depth account of the international critique of the German display at the New York Decorate Your House show.

König concluded that this kind of “production circumvents the real needs of the masses (*An dem wirklichen Bedarf der breiten Massen wird vorbeiproduziert*).”⁹¹

Pressures to become active in Germany’s cultural reconstruction also came from other quarters. The Western Allies, the American military administration in particular, intensified efforts to integrate West Germany culturally into the ranks of western democratic nations. Financed by the Marshall Plan, a traveling exhibition called “We Build a Better Life,” introduced modern home design to the West German population. In its three week run, it drew half a million visitors (40 percent of them from the East) in Berlin, Hannover, and Stuttgart. Nationally diverse displays offered a common Western material aesthetic reflecting “the same taste, same needs, and same interests [that] bond the Atlantic community tightly together.”⁹² This “same taste” was a commitment to a modernist aesthetic reminiscent of the Bauhaus with clear lines, sparsely furnished rooms, and the limited use of patterned fabrics and ornamented household wares (see figure 2). Werkbund member König was highly critical of the exhibition, observing that “the products displayed at the Marshall Plan’s “New Home Furnishings” show were not ‘representational’ in style” of what was to be German design in his eyes.⁹³

Generally speaking, the West German attitude toward American patronage in design was conflicted. In the case of educational institutionalization, West Germans highly depended on American financing. One great example of this ambivalence toward cultural American influence is the Ulm Institute of Design (*Hochschule für Gestaltung*)

⁹¹ Heinrich König, presentation “Rat für Formgebung,” 25 October 1950, B102/34493, BAK.

⁹² Exhibition catalog, *Wir bauen ein besseres Leben: Eine Ausstellung über die Produktivität der Atlantischen Gemeinschaft auf dem Gebiet des Wohnbedarfs* (Stuttgart: Gerd Hatje, 1952), 3.

⁹³ Heinrich König quoted in Greg Castillo, “Marshall Plan Modernism in Divided Germany,” in *Cold War Modern, Design 1945-1970*, ed. David Crowley and Jane Pavitt (London: V&A Publishing, 2008), 67.

in Baden-Württemberg.⁹⁴ Inge Scholl, the younger sister of Nazi resistance leaders Hans and Sophie Scholl, joined forces with Swiss designer Max Bill, a Bauhaus student and head of the Swiss Werkbund, in 1953 to found a school that provided a model for responsible political education that addressed the materialization of policies through design, giving design a moral authority in defining the character of postwar life.⁹⁵ Their goal was to “educate a democratic elite as a counterforce against the tides of intolerance.”⁹⁶ Revealing its aspirations within the legacy of German design, the school labeled itself the “New Bauhaus” in 1955, thus signaling to the world that antifascist resistance and international modernism were alive and well in the Federal Republic.⁹⁷ It moreover established West Germany’s claim to Bauhaus modernism as its cultural heritage. The project was mostly funded by the Scholl foundation, but among others the regional government of Baden-Württemberg and the American High Commissioner, General McCloy, supported the effort. While they took American money, Ulm’s design vision quickly developed an anti-American stance that objected to Western consumerism. Rather, Bill, Scholl, and her graphic designer husband Otl Aicher strove to develop designs that were driven by the rational and systematic, rather than style and fashion. “Within this,” Aynsley observes, “the notion of timelessness was invoked as an important

⁹⁴ Leading among the American critics was industrial designer Walter Kersting, who openly criticized the American funding for Ulm in a letter to Ludwig Erhard for the fear of American control over German design: “Above all, the idea that the United States will guide us to a new culture of design is no gain for the German reputation in the world.” Instead, Kersting pleaded for the founding of an exclusively German (*rein deutsche*) industrial design institute. Walter Kersting to Ludwig Erhard, 30 September 1951. B102/34493, BAK.

⁹⁵ Aynsley, *Designing Modern Germany*, 179-180.

⁹⁶ Max Bill quoted in Betts, *Authority of Everyday Objects*, 142.

⁹⁷ For an extensive treatment of the programmatic and ideological linkages between Bauhaus and HfG Ulm see Claudia Heitmann, “Die Bauhaus-Rezeption in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland von 1949-1968 – Etappen und Institutionen,” dissertation (Berlin, Hochschule der Künste Berlin, 27 February 2001), 98-223; Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects*, 149.

criterion, defined against the phenomenon of conspicuous consumption and in-built obsolescence of the American system of industrial styling.”⁹⁸ Caught between the western Allies’ visions for a new Germany and the ever-present communist alternative of East Germany, the Federal Republic needed its own strong central institutions that could shape its post-fascist identity.

The creation of a national Werkbund umbrella organization in 1950 under Hans Schwippert’s leadership decisively shaped the course of events in the institutionalization of design.⁹⁹ United, the Werkbund successfully impressed upon the Adenauer administration the notion that a centralized governmental institution should define West Germany’s commodity aesthetic. Through its interwar experience in promoting a German product culture as well as through its close ties to the Bonn political elites –Theodor Heuss, the first President of the Federal Republic of Germany, held membership– the Werkbund enjoyed access to the federal government. Aside from talks between Werkbund members and representatives of the Federal Ministry of Economics, Werkbund member König and parliamentarian Arno Hennig (SPD) lobbied for the design council in Bonn.¹⁰⁰ While economic connections between design and export rates dominated the discussion, the aesthetic weight clearly lay on shaping a national style. Referencing the national products of world renown, such as Murano glass, Brussels lace, and French luxury commodities, expert witness Max Wiederanders demanded similar German industrial excellence: German quality production that German consumers could trust. Assimilation to foreign tastes in order to increase exports, however, he regarded as

⁹⁸ Aynsley, *Designing Modern Germany*, 181.

⁹⁹ Oesterreich, *Die “Gute Form” im Wiederaufbau*, 285.

¹⁰⁰ For the details of the parliamentary proceedings see *ibid.*, 286-289.

secondary: German workmanship in quality products should speak for itself.¹⁰¹ What the Werkbund wanted was a national institution executing a prescriptive and holistic aesthetic reform program. This paternalistic attitude toward consumers in regard to style and taste represented continuity with the earlier decades of the century in the Werkbund's self-conception: aesthetic education and the struggle against kitsch in the everyday.

In the early years of the Federal Republic, however, parliamentarians' questioned the legitimacy of such centralized "taste paternalism" vis-à-vis the population. West Germany not only upheld cultural liberalism, but had also inscribed the decentralization of culture into the Basic Law, making it the responsibility of the individual states rather than the federal government. Yet the term "taste paternalism" encapsulates the missionary zeal with which the Werkbund took up its self-assigned task of enlightening the population about aesthetic principles instilled with democratic values. The inherent contradiction in this rigid approach toward recivilizing Germans to become responsible democratic citizens, though, was not apparent to the Werkbund members. The association put its best efforts forward to ease politicians' concerns about the illiberal implications of their goals, but instead expert witness Wiederanders confirmed the elitist philosophy of Werkbund circles: "The 'audience' (*Publikum*) has neither good nor bad taste. Its taste always refers to that of the 'powerful' (*Mächtigen der Erde*), who shape the *Zeitgeist*, the meaning of life and mankind's ambitions and illusions."¹⁰² This top-down approach stood in stark contrast to West Germany's socio-political goals of democratization and liberalization in all areas of cultural, economic, and public life.

¹⁰¹ Report before the Bundestag Committee on Cultural Policy, Max Wiederanders, 25 October 1950, B102/34493, BAK.

¹⁰² Report, Wiederanders, 25 October 1950, B102/34493, BAK.

Meanwhile, the Cold War climate and the East German socialist alternative added suspicions regarding leftist agendas to parliamentary concerns about the possible effects of socially and morally implicated political aesthetics. Taking into consideration that the Werkbund was historically linked to leftist reform movements, official hesitation to embrace the plans for a national design institution seemed plausible to contemporaries. Thus, increasingly aware of the state's apprehensions, Werkbund strategy changed to playing into the government's two main interests in industrial design: export increase and the diplomatic value of material culture. At later parliamentary hearings in 1950 and 1951, Werkbund representatives repeatedly invoked the embarrassment of the New York fair to stress the economic gains that the Federal Republic could acquire through the sponsorship of design. Eventually, the evident economic opportunity trumped parliamentary apprehensions about violating democratic principles through centralization of cultural policy-making. The Bundestag voted in favor of the initiative with only one opposing vote in 1951.¹⁰³ This event put the Federal Republic's claim to Weimar modernism swiftly in place ensuring Werkbund control over design politics and sending the country on its way to finding a West German aesthetic that could withstand overbearing Americanization. The initiative furthermore offered a democratic alternative to socialism in the East and helped to overcome the Third Reich aesthetics of power. Concerned about moral decay of the country's cultural fabric, the fight against kitsch as its aesthetic manifestation in mass production connected design politics increasingly to the economic realm. Encountering similar challenges, the GDR fought out its own battles about cultural policy and its role in turning East Germans into socialist citizens.

¹⁰³ Oesterreich, "*Gute Form*" im Wiederaufbau, 288.

Politicization of Design: The Struggle to Create Modern German Aesthetics

In the GDR of the early 1950s, the Formalism Debate (*Formalismus Debatte*) started an ideological-artistic dispute about a more holistic approach to the aesthetics of the socialist material environment. Deeming Socialist Realism the official aesthetic, the Party announced a radical reorientation in all areas of cultural activity at the third SED party convention on July 20 – 24, 1950.¹⁰⁴ By displaying cultural coherence with the Soviet Union, the GDR government strove to demonstrate its “otherness” in contrast to West Germany. From the beginning, Socialist Realism strove to connect artistic expression to the task of enlightening and ideologically re-educating the working population in the spirit of socialism. Its method relied on the depiction of reality and its revolutionary development from the perspective of socialist partisanship. Dealing with modes of socialist production and class struggle, Socialist Realism focused on everyday work heroes, who built the socialist utopia, to inspire popular ideological identification. This artistic expression received its national substance through the reliance on folk culture, materially articulated in artisanal traditions.¹⁰⁵ By contrast, East German politicians, led by General Secretary Walter Ulbricht, a cabinetmaker by trade, denounced modern functionalism as artless, international, and cosmopolitan. Its lack of ornamentation, according to the government, signified the missing element of national culture and the limitation of design to simple shapes made this aesthetic formalistic in the eyes of officials. The fact that West Germany chose functionalism as its official aesthetic

¹⁰⁴ Martin Bober, “Von der Idee zum Mythos: Die Rezeption des Bauhaus in beiden Teilen Deutschlands in Zeiten des Neuanfangs (1945 und 1989),” dissertation (Universität Kassel, n.d.), 134.

¹⁰⁵ Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History and Ritual*, 34 and 150.

during the years of East Germany's Formalism Debate only reinforced the political nature of the GDR's decision to reject Germany's interwar modernism.

For a centrally organized state, this cultural reorientation had far-reaching implications regarding the freedom of artistic expression. To avoid censorship, the artistic community challenged the Party's sweeping decision publicly. Over the course of three years, the government repeatedly defended its stance in public forums such as newspapers and symposia. In this way, the Formalism Debate became decreasingly cultural and increasingly political in content. At a time of growing Cold War antagonism between East and West, bloc alignment outpaced the search for a modern socialist aesthetic and, eventually, the nationalistic values in the realist aesthetics of cultural Stalinism held sway. In January 1954, an order by the GDR Council of Ministers commanded the furniture industry to develop aesthetically pleasing furnishings "based on the national cultural heritage."¹⁰⁶ Reminiscent of the style and ornamentation of the *Gründerzeit* (c. 1870 – 1890, literally: Founders' Period), the German cultural heritage in the GDR was henceforth expressed in artful decorations, curved lines, and expensive handicraft techniques. East Germany's first major public housing project in East Berlin, the *Stalinallee*, displayed wedding-cake style facades, heavily adorned with sculptures and mosaics depicting workers and farmers. A coherent vision for the apartments' interiors followed in a 1952 exhibition held in the first finished high rise. The furnishings were bulky with patterned upholstery fabric. Pleated lampshades, lace curtains and squat-

¹⁰⁶ Kant (Leiter Entwicklungsstelle Hellerau) to Wurzler and Weber. 11.10.1954, Re: Vorbereitung K A S und B K V, here: Note from Weber 10 November 1954, Deutsche Werkstätten Hellerau 11764/3131, Sächsisches Staatsarchiv Dresden [hereafter referred to as SStD].

shaped porcelain added a curious petit-bourgeois feeling (see figure 3).¹⁰⁷ This emphasis on ornamentation simultaneously represented a search for a politically untainted past, a demonstration of integration into the Eastern bloc, and aesthetic delineation from West Germany.

Considering the political realities in the GDR, historians have treated the Formalism Debate as a predetermined affair or ignore it altogether.¹⁰⁸ Martin Bober, for example, argues that the debate was merely the Party's attempt to create the illusion of a pluralistic public sphere in the GDR.¹⁰⁹ Yet there exists evidence to the contrary, that the debate comprised an openly fought battle between political thinkers and functionalist designers. As shown above, a number of schools founded on Bauhaus teaching principles already existed in East Germany by 1950. Esteemed socialists like Horst Michel led these interior design schools, on which the country depended, to create commodities for reconstruction. Second, the fact that the debate lasted about three years and was conducted in public speaks to the earnestness with which politicians and cultural elites immersed themselves in the making of East German official culture.¹¹⁰ By discarding the Formalism Debate as a predetermined affair, Bober misses the initial stage in negotiations between designers and the state over the place of Bauhaus modernism in GDR design and the struggle against an unfamiliar culture of Soviet provenance.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ An official photographer captured the open house exhibition on film, 3 May 1952, E IV b1, 14 565/5N, BAK.

¹⁰⁸ See Rubin, *Synthetic Socialism*, 45, and Selle, *Geschichte des Design in Deutschland*. However, Paul Betts and Greg Castillo have noted the discursive quality of the debate. See Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*, esp. 51; Betts, "Building Socialism at Home: The Case of East German Interiors," in *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics*, ed. Katherine Pence and Paul Betts (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 102.

¹⁰⁹ Bober, "Von der Idee zum Mythos," 143.

¹¹⁰ Martin Kelm, in discussion with the author, 4 May 2009.

¹¹¹ Aynsley, *Designing Modern Germany*, 177

Bauhaus modernism and its students nevertheless comprised the main target of the political campaign. At the risk of losing its livelihood, the GDR Bauhaus community resisted state intervention in artistic expression. Mart Stam, a Dutch architect appointed as the first director of the new School for Applied Arts (*Hochschule für angewandte Kunst*) in Berlin Weissensee in 1950 became the most prominent casualty of the conflict. Stam, a socialist idealist who had worked with architect and urban planner Ernst May on the Neues Bauen public housing projects in Frankfurt a. M. in the 1920s and went with the May Brigade to help build the industrial cities of Magnitogorsk, Makeyevka and Orsk in the Soviet Union, had introduced the Bauhaus curriculum and methods in Weissensee.¹¹² Stam additionally founded and headed the Weissensee Institute for Applied Art (*Institut für angewandte Kunst*) to respond to the immediate needs of East Germany's postwar production.¹¹³ The three years of the Formalism Debate with cultural Stalinism eventually gaining the upper hand, however, ostracized Stam and his wife. They left the GDR in 1953, disenchanted with the country where Stam had hoped to contribute his vision for a socialist way of life to a true Marxist state.

Stam's departure from Weissensee marked the final stage in the Formalism Debate as well as the institutionalization of cultural Stalinism in East Germany. The remaining Bauhaus community viewed this development critically. In a 1985 interview,

¹¹² Between 1930 and 1933, Ernst May, the famous architect of "Neues Wohnen" in Frankfurt on Main, went to the Soviet Union to support the construction of Socialism there. His team included the Austrian architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, who invented the purely functional Frankfurt kitchen, the precursor to the modern kitchens that are designed rationally around the individual work steps of cooking, cleaning, and washing. Most of the Brigade members left the Soviet Union disheartened by the restrictions that the bleak economic and political reality set to their idealistic vision of a holistic approach to housing in which not only technological and architectural ambition figured at large, but which also centered around the future inhabitants' wellbeing.

¹¹³ Selman Selmanagic, interview by Siegfried Zoel, transcript, 19 September 1985, Folder "Materialien zur Designgeschichte der DDR," 14/A/3, SiG.

Selman Selmanagic, a former Bauhaus student, highly regarded interior designer, and architect who worked with Stam at both the Institut für angewandte Kunst and the Hochschule, lambasted the transformation of the institute into a government agency.¹¹⁴ He saw Walter Heisig, Stam's successor at the institute, as a person "without comprehension," who "designed florets on ceramics and such kitsch."¹¹⁵ Labeled as "German cultural heritage", this naïve representation of reality was henceforth the official aesthetic of the GDR. The remaining Bauhaus disciples in East Germany, as Eli Rubin astutely observes, left Berlin and went into artistic exile in the provincial centers of the GDR.¹¹⁶ For example, Stam's student Martin Kelm started the independent Halle Institute for Design and Development with fellow Stam student Günter Reissmann in 1958.

While the sun was sinking on functionalism in the East, it rose for their counterparts in the West who fortified their political and cultural influence in the early 1950s. On April 4, 1951, the Bundestag resolved to create a design council to enhance Germany's image abroad and promote the country's exports.¹¹⁷ Its official tasks included "to advise industry by procuring qualified creative minds, to reestablish Germany's competitiveness at international exhibitions and trade fairs, to support the education of new designers in arts and crafts schools and professional schools, and to take all measures necessary that benefit the instruction about quality and shape as well as the education of traders and consumers."¹¹⁸ Therefore gaining official avenues of power as

¹¹⁴ Selman Selmanagic, interview by Zoel, SiG. As an urban planner, Selmanagic contributed to the concerted reconstruction effort of Berlin's four zones between 1945 and 1950.

¹¹⁵ Selman Selmanagic, interview by Zoel, SiG.

¹¹⁶ Eli Rubin, "The Form of Socialism without Ornament: Consumption, Ideology, and the Fall and Rise of Modernist Design in the German Democratic Republic," *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 2 (2006): 160.

¹¹⁷ Bundestag Minutes, 129. Sitzung, 4 April 1951, B102/34493, BAK.

¹¹⁸ Information leaflet, "Rat für Formgebung: Stiftung zur Förderung der Formgestaltung," n.d., B 102/34492, BAK.

the arbiter of West German good taste, the Werkbund seemed to have finally reached its goal. By exerting aesthetical influence over both industry and consumers, the design council revived the Werkbund's elitist reform project of the prewar years.

This centralization of cultural power in the hands of the Werkbund, though, was compromised by two factors: the funding situation and the decisions concerning personnel. After the period of cultural streamlining in the Third Reich, the founding years of the Federal Republic saw a flurry of activity by lobby groups, particularly in the arts. Industrial design, emerging as a new profession in Germany after World War II, competed for state funding with high culture. While the Federal Ministry of the Interior financially supported the arts, industrial design did not fall under their jurisdiction, being at the intersection of arts and production.¹¹⁹ The connections politicians drew between industrial interests and design considerations resulted in the subordination of the Rat für Formgebung under the Federal Ministry of Economics. Henceforth, this decision, primarily based on budget considerations, linked design to export promotion. In June 1953 the West German Rat für Formgebung finally set to work in Darmstadt, Hesse, as a non-profit foundation of public utility under the auspices of the Federal Ministry of Economics.¹²⁰ With the exception of international exhibitions, West German economic interests, not the Werkbund's cultural hegemony, outlined the state's plan for the design council. This initial conflict in founding the design council continued to generate strong infighting until the Werkbund officially retreated from the Rat für Formgebung in 1968.

¹¹⁹ Michael Erlhoff (executive manager of the Rat für Formgebung 1984-1990), in discussion with the author, 6 July 2009.

¹²⁰ Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects*, 178-211.

The second problem affected the make-up of the Rat für Formgebung. The original goal had been to create an advisory body of distinct personalities that took on cultural leadership in the young republic. Yet the Ministry of Economics soon abandoned this plan and, instead, pushed for including representatives from all economic fields. Minister of Economics Ludwig Erhard (1949-1963, CDU) initially appointed sixteen designers and industrialists to the council. These appointments almost exclusively included Werkbund and esthete industrialists, indicating the state's faith in industry as a partner in social reform. But Erhard appointed twenty more unsalaried consultants—representatives of varying backgrounds such as crafts, labor unions, consumer organizations, and public administration to democratize the new institution—which started the discord between the government and the initial council members.¹²¹ The Werkbund especially objected the appointment of Eduard Schlafjew as director. Schlafjew had been a competent economic administrator under Erhard's Ministry of Economics, which made him a "puppet of industry" and lacking in design expertise from the point of view of the Werkbund.¹²² Instead of an aesthetic mission then, the council would become a pawn for economic interests, a "second Federal Trade Office."¹²³ This, the Werkbund feared, would strip the design council of cultural assertiveness and diminish its leadership in the aesthetics of material culture.¹²⁴ Lobbyist König, worried about a loss of control and influence, likened the situation to the Werkbund's first experience with failing state-cooperation in the Weimar Republic under the Reich Art

¹²¹ Information leaflet, "Rat für Formgebung: Stiftung zur Förderung der Formgestaltung," n.d., B 102/34492, BAK.

¹²² Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects*, 184.

¹²³ Heinrich König to Arno Henning (MdB), 30 June 1951, Estate Mia Seeger, 2068/A 81, Stadtarchiv Stuttgart [hereafter referred to as StSt].

¹²⁴ Hans Schwippert to Hinsch, 15 June 1952, Estate Mia Seeger, 2068/A 81, StSt.

Supervisor (*Reichskunstwart*).¹²⁵ After more than a year of negotiations with the ministry and threats of withdrawal from the project altogether, the Werkbund chose the lesser of two evils and compromised. They accepted Schlafesjew's appointment on the condition that one of their own, long-time Werkbund members, Mia Seeger, would fill the position of general secretary. With her appointment, the Werkbund gained lasting artistic influence over the Rat für Formgebung. Seeger was an experienced "cultural broker of German modernism" whose expertise had been proven in her organizational work for important Werkbund exhibitions, most notably the 1927 Weissenhofsiedlung.¹²⁶ In the end, instead of insisting on their vision for the design council and risking to alienate the ministry, leading Werkbund members decided to work within the ministerial framework, a framework that they believed to be a watered down version of *their* design institution.¹²⁷

The legal status of the design council remained contested within the Federal Republic. In a pamphlet introducing the council and its task, the presidium labeled it a government-initiated "self-administrated organization" instead of a state institution. Both the federal government and the Bundestag had operated "from the assumption that wide circles in the German economy will recognize the importance of industrial design and support it respectively."¹²⁸ Generally speaking, the Werkbund's success in Bonn can be accredited to their connections to the economic elites represented in the Federation of

¹²⁵ Heinrich König to Arno Henning, 30 June 1951, Estate Mia Seeger, 2068/A 81, StSt.

¹²⁶ Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects*, 184.

¹²⁷ The Werkbund issued a memorandum "Zur Einrichtung eines Rat für Formgebung", in which it proposed the founding of a second, assistant body to the actual design council. This task force of representatives from all tiers of the economic system was to help implement the Rat für Formgebung's decisions. Among the memorandum's signatories were Heinrich König, Karl Ott, Egon Eiermann, and Mia Seeger. Memorandum, August 1951, Estate Mia Seeger, 2068/A 81, StSt.

¹²⁸ Information leaflet, "Der Rat für Formgebung: Stiftung zur Förderung der Formgestaltung," n.d., B 102/34492, BAK.

German Industries (*Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie*, BDI). Its membership consisted of professional architects, designers, and urban planners who often worked closely with the industry. The progress made in production technology and methods prescribed private enterprise a broadening of political activism to include theoretical-economic areas. After initial hesitation, the business community strongly supported the Rat für Formgebung. Leading industrialists, such as Siemens and AEG, set up a foundation “in support of design,” from which the design council drew some funds.¹²⁹

Through overlapping membership the BDI was well represented in the Werkbund and vice versa.¹³⁰ This overlap in membership shows further how a small group of designers and entrepreneurs strove to exert influence over the artistic and economic policies in the inception of this national design institution. As the government increasingly set the terms in negotiations about the council in 1951 and 1952, industry looked for alternative means to promote their companies’ design. The BDI founded a project similar to the national design council, the Committee for Industrial Design (*Arbeitskreis für Industrielle Formgebung*) in 1952, illustrates this influential group’s multilayered efforts to realize their aesthetic and economic ambitions. Fourteen of the thirty-six associations represented by the BDI were present at the constituting assembly of the Arbeitskreis, which shows considerable interest for questions of form and design among industrialists. This initial success quickly resulted in the BDI’s involvement in a

¹²⁹ Statutes, Stiftung zur Förderung der Formgestaltung, April 1953, B 102/34492, BAK.

¹³⁰ Memo, Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie, Arbeitskreis für industrielle Formgestaltung, Bericht über die Arbeitstagung am 28./29.10.52 in Darmstadt, 8 December 1952, Hartmann Estate, Binder 13, ADK 7-1384/52, Deutscher Werkbund Archiv [hereafter referred to as DWB]. Jonathan Wiesen, *West German Industry and the Challenge of the Nazi Past, 1945-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 159-163.

second, much more practically involved area of activism in design.¹³¹ Gustav Stein, the BDI's lawyer, became a prominent figure in this process as he pulled the strings behind the scenes by connecting potent and willing industrialists with the opportunity to advertise their wares – as long as they subscribed to the principles of Good Design. The BDI Arbeitskreis organized special shows of selected, well-designed products at the annual industrial fairs in Hannover, Frankfurt, and Cologne.¹³² To publicize their work, the BDI Arbeitskreis started the non-profit organization Industrial Shape (*Industrieform*) in the city of Essen, whose cause evolved around displaying well-designed goods.¹³³ These permanent exhibitions with industry-sponsored displays aimed at improving sales by educating the public about Good Design. Within three years of its opening in November 1955, more than 492,000 visitors saw the exhibition, which was put together by a jury headed by no other than Werkbund president Hans Schwippert.¹³⁴ Such successes, showing the popular demand to learn about the features of modern appliances, encouraged the industry to retain its efforts alongside the design council throughout the economic miracle years and well into the 1960s.

Perhaps this dual activism of entrepreneurs in both the Rat für Formgebung and the BDI Arbeitskreis caused the financial footing of the design council to remain a major problem. As mentioned before, in its inception the Rat took organizational cues from similar institutions in other countries. One of the reasons why the British design council impressed the initiators of the West German equivalent in particular was its stable

¹³¹ Oesterreich, *Die "Gute Form" im Wiederaufbau*, 230-231

¹³² Report, BDI Arbeitskreis für industrielle Formgestaltung, 8 December 1952, Hartmann Estate, ADK 7-1384/52, DWB.

¹³³ Carl Hundhausen to Ludwig Erhard, 3 September 1958, B 102/34492, BAK.

¹³⁴ Hundhausen to Erhard, 3 September 1958, B 102/34492, BAK.

financials. The British Council of Industrial Design was a state-supported agency with a budget of over 6 million DM (West German Marks) of which the state provided 3.5 million by 1967.¹³⁵ The GDR, for comparison, financed its later design institution with state subsidies of 796,000 DDM (East German Marks¹³⁶) in 1963, its first fiscal year.¹³⁷ In contrast, in the first five years after its inception in 1952/53, the West German Design Council received only 70,000 DM yearly.¹³⁸ This amount grew steadily to 220,000 DM in 1967 – still a fraction of the funds available to the British Council of Design and a less than a third of what the East German industrial designers had. Part of the problem was that the West German industry did not keep up with its formal promise to support the Rat für Formgebung financially in later years. This lack of continued commitment might have resulted from the success that industry-controlled initiatives, such as Industrieform, achieved. Industry's initial dependence on the design council as a state institution seems to have decreased proportionally as the significance of the BDI projects increased.

The years of 1950 through 1953 are therefore an important period for German state-guided industrial design. Though lacking constructive material results in either Germany, this period set the tracks for official aesthetics and established the structural parameters in which the design councils operated throughout the years of division. From the Rat für Formgebung's inception, the Bonn Republic worked against any kind of centralist scheming, although the council's mission was, paradoxically, all-encompassing

¹³⁵ Memorandum "Formgestaltung als wirtschafts- und kulturpolitischer Faktor," 8 June 1967, B102/227796, BAK.

¹³⁶ At that time, the exchange rate between West and East German Marks was 1:1.

¹³⁷ Budget 1964, Zentralinstitut für Formgestaltung, 25 November 1963, DF 7/3, Bundesarchiv Berlin [hereafter referred to as BAB].

¹³⁸ The government budget allocated a yearly sum of 70,000 DM under title 604 to support "rationalization, standardization, and design." This amount was raised to 120,000 DM in 1957/58 by the addition of title 601 for the "promotion of crafts." Itemized budget, "Aufwendungen des Bundes zur Förderung des 'Rat für Formgebung,'" B 120/34492, BAK.

in design matters. Despite the limitations set by the state, for the Werkbund it was now or never. Ultimately, after decades of lobbying, 1950-53 were the years when the Werkbund goals finally intersected with state interests to create a modern identity for a German state. The Formalism Debate, which happened in the GDR at the very same time, had a similar effect on the design landscape in the East. The Institut für angewandte Kunst in Weissensee became a proponent of cultural Stalinism after Stam's departure in 1953. But the GDR continued its efforts to centralize design, which eventually resulted in the same conceptual shift that had already come about in the West, allocating design as a part of the economic reorganization process.

Institutionalization in the East: Regrouping after the Formalism Debate

In the GDR, the creation of a central design institution comparable to the Rat für Formgebung began with the Weissensee Institut für Angewandte Kunst, which had been added to the Ministry of Culture as an advisory body in 1952. However, the practical implications of this institution under Heisig's leadership remained limited and the archives are silent about its ability to guide the search for an East German national aesthetic.¹³⁹ The necessary addition of another advisory body to the Ministry of Culture, the Council for Industrial Shape (*Rat für Industrieform*) in 1962, points toward the Weissensee institute's weaknesses in the economic realm. Assigned to ensure the "implementation of state initiatives in the field of industrial design," the council had to "supervise their realization through economic institutions, trade organizations and

¹³⁹ The Bundesarchiv Berlin holds the documents of the Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung (DF 7). The collection for the first years of institutionalization is surprisingly meager. The Haus der Geschichte branch in Berlin Prenzlauer Berg, the Sammlung industrielle Gestaltung, holds the AiF library and the material culture collection. These holdings mostly include published sources and advice literature.

specialized institutes.”¹⁴⁰ The main objective was to bring design into agreement with state economic planning while complying with the principles of East German cultural politics. Located at the intersection of manifold economic processes, the representatives on the council included all sectors of the economy: up to 25 designers or representatives of analogous universities and specialized institutes, one representative each from the Ministry of Culture, the National Economic Council (*Volkswirtschaftsrat*), the State Planning Commission, the Ministry for Trade and Supply, the Ministry for Foreign Trade and inner-German Trade, the German Construction Academy, the German Office for Material and Product Testing, the Office for Standardization, the Association of German Fine Artists, the Chamber of Technology, and two to three representative from the People’s Owned Companies.¹⁴¹ Horst Michel became a member of the council’s board; Martin Kelm, the Mart Stam student who had been working in Halle, received the Minister of Culture’s call to serve on the council as a representative of a specialized institute after which he moved quickly onto the council’s board.¹⁴²

In contrast to the West, the East initially thought design to be purely a part of cultural issues in the development of a socialist society. The initial positioning of the Rat für Industrieform under the Ministry of Culture indicates that the East German government still categorized industrial design as applied arts and did not immediately see it as an asset to economic development in the early 1960s. This notion possibly originated with the country’s focus on heavy industry in the early years of reconstruction. To fulfill reparation payments to the Soviet Union while at the same time following the economic

¹⁴⁰ Statutes, Rat für Industrieform, 1 July 1962, DF 7/3057, BAB.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Membership list, n.d., DF 7/3057, BAB and Mitgliederliste, n.d., DF 7/3167, BAB.

principles that had catapulted the Soviet Union from an agricultural country to an industrial powerhouse, the GDR put most of its resources into coal mining and steel production.¹⁴³ Yet after the experience of the June 17, 1953 workers' uprising that spread like wild fire from Berlin throughout the country after the government raised construction quotas but failed to fulfill consumer demands, the Party became increasingly aware of the political dimension of consumer goods. Fulfilling demand became a way to gain public support through material means. Eight years later, the closing of the German-German border on August 13, 1961 heightened the political profile of consumer goods. By building the Wall as a manifestation of German division, the GDR not only kept its population from leaving, but also temporarily cut off the flow of western goods. This step actually aggravated the GDR's consumption dilemma, because the Berlin Wall underscored the line between a prosperous Germany in the West and one pressed to fulfill basic consumer demands in the East. Accordingly, creating a distinct aesthetic in commodities different from the modern project in the West, increasingly became a means of working towards a national identity that could forge a feeling of belonging. International developments further contributed to a new attitude toward the ideological meaning of material culture. The policy of peaceful coexistence as "the new mode of global conflict" after the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 revived the struggle for a socialist culture: "Peaceful coexistence has at its root the decisive, forceful battle against all manifestations of bourgeois ideology. Specific artistic problems are also to be classified in this broader political context."¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ André Steiner, *Von Plan zu Plan: Eine Wirtschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2004), 73.

¹⁴⁴ Conception, "Die Arbeit der Redaktion "Bildende Kunst" am Jahrgang 1963," n.d., DF 7/3167, BAB.

At this critical point, Martin Kelm reinvigorated the Institut für angewandte Kunst and increased its political responsibilities under the name “Zentralinstitut für Formgestaltung” in 1963. Kelm thus returned from his artistic exile in Halle to Berlin and brought new vigor and control in the centralized efforts to direct industrial design.¹⁴⁵ Shortly thereafter, the Zentralinstitut with Kelm as its head began its ascent to prominence within the East German planned economy, foreshadowing the eventual success of functionalist design within East Germany’s production industries. Although the earlier Rat für Industrieform was the first attempt at creating an advisory body that connected all areas of the East German economic apparatus, the Ministry of Culture had no control over economic planning. Meanwhile, the Zentralinstitut was the first East German government body committed to forging a cohesive aesthetic with increasing influence in the planning process. Throughout the 1960s, industrial design proceeded to become more deeply anchored in the economic structures of the GDR.¹⁴⁶ In 1965, the Zentralinstitut moved to an institution dedicated to standardization and product testing, the German Office for Standardization and Product Testing (Deutsches Amt für Messwesen und Warenprüfung, DAMW) together with the council, which was renamed “Rat für Gestaltung”. The transfer from the Ministry of Culture to the DAMW signaled a significant change in perception of industrial design’s role in East Germany’s economy. Rather than being thought of as a beautification of products, politicians began to see

¹⁴⁵ As mentioned above, the GDR opted for a *Gründerzeit* aesthetic in the earlier years of its existence. Especially the Formalism debate of the early 1950s shaped the anti-functionalism outlook at this time. For Martin Kelm’s career path see Rubin, “The Form of Socialism,” 160.

¹⁴⁶ Statement, Entwurf der Sekretariats-Vorlage „Über die Änderung der Unterstellung des Rates für Industrieform und des Zentralinstitutes für Formgestaltung sowie über weitere Maßnahmen zur Verbesserung der Industrieformgestaltung,” 26 September 1964, DF 7/2207, BAB.

industrial design as part of a scientifically measurable process to enhance products and to make them competitive in the international market.

The Politics of Design

The putsch deposing Walter Ulbricht from power in 1971 facilitated Kelm's next step up the career ladder. The new first party secretary General Erich Honecker changed the Zentralinstitut into a government institution in its own right in 1972 and renamed it "Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung." Kelm had already become a member of the Council of Ministers with the Zentralinstitut's 1965 transition to the DAMW, but as the director of the institute he officially became part of the economic planning apparatus. Given the far-reaching implications of his authority in design decisions, Rubin concludes: "Kelm now had power over other ministers of the economy, and was elevated to the position of State Secretary, making him almost untouchable by any aesthetic criticism."¹⁴⁷ Two laws ensured that the central design institution remained the main arbiter of taste in the GDR. First, the 1965 law that required all People-Owned Companies (*Volkseigene Betriebe*, VEB) in the production industries to employ designers and, second, the 1973 law that obliged all factories to "outsource" their industrial designing work exclusively to the Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung became crucial stepping stones for Kelm's lasting influence over East German industrial design and the tipping point of the power scale in favor of the functionalists.¹⁴⁸

The possibilities of one-party rule and the mechanisms of the planned economy enabled Kelm's increasing hold on power. Contrary to the competitive associational

¹⁴⁷ Rubin, "The Form of Socialism," 161-162.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

environment that shifted cultural leadership in the West, SED nomenclature added to the upward mobility and endurance of GDR office-holders.¹⁴⁹ Günther Mittag, a member of the Politbüro since 1958 and Secretary of Economics in the Central Committee since 1962, took Kelm under his wing. Mittag oversaw Kelm's dissertation about the role of industrial design in socialism and vouched for his party credentials as well as his aesthetic vision for a socialist way of living.¹⁵⁰ Meanwhile, passionate socialists like Selman Selmanagic, the director of the Weissensee School, felt that Kelm betrayed socialist cultural principles. Selmanagic summarized his low opinion of Kelm's qualification in industrial design: "Unfortunately, it's the case here [in the GDR, the author] that Kelm pats himself on the back self-congratulatory. But nobody knows him. And when I see objects, I see where he finds his inspiration. That upsets me as a comrade. I want that the capitalists to copy from us, and not we from them. That is my goal, but I did not reach it, unfortunately."¹⁵¹ Whereas not many people in the GDR design scene took notice of Kelm for his artistic vision, he definitely was known to the political elites as an excellent bureaucrat with good connections. Kelm thus personally benefited from the standardization of industrial design and its separation from the arts in the East.

Nevertheless, Kelm's ascend to power completely contradicted GDR cultural policy. As logical as the relocation of the Zentralinstitut under the DAMW may have sounded in the general climate of standardization and production streamlining, an

¹⁴⁹ The significance of party credentials for upward mobility within the state apparatus of the GDR has been discussed by Catherine Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries: German Communists and their Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

¹⁵⁰ Rubin, "The Form of Socialism," 161.

¹⁵¹ Selman Selmanagic, interview by Zoel, SiG.

exclusively linear interpretation of this event as the ‘natural’ outcome in the East’s progress toward economical production would undervalue the ideological determination among the political elite. The earlier, triumph over the struggle against kitsch, spearheaded by designers like Michel who were trained in the tradition of Weimar modernism, show that the ideologist had the power to dominate cultural debates. In fact, the party apparatus was painfully aware of the ideological inconsistencies among the industrial designers. In 1964, the Culture Department at the Central Committee reported attitudinal problems among the Ministry of Culture’s industrial designers: “Revisionist attacks from the applied arts against the cultural policies of the Party are supported by some of the Zentralinstitut für Gestaltung members of staff.” With openly functionalist arguments, the industrial designers argued “against a connection between applied arts and our socialist ideology as well as the designer’s task to work according to the newly developing aesthetic necessities of socialist men.”¹⁵² Fearing that these challenges from within would unhinge applied arts from the “edifice of socialist aesthetics” and could even result in attacks on the principles of Socialist Realism in the fine arts, the Culture Department demanded adequate strictness to get the Zentralinstitut back in Party line. In a way, Kelm and his unruly institute thus were kicked upstairs to avoid further meddling in cultural politics, though the Culture Department knew that “the supporters of this wrong opinion will interpret the Zentralinstitut breaking away from the Ministry of Culture as a confirmation of their opinion.”¹⁵³ It becomes clear that the SED never entirely succeeded in controlling the aesthetic-ideological vision in the field of industrial

¹⁵² Statement, Entwurf der Sekretariats-Vorlage, “Über die Änderung der Unterstellung des Rates für Industrieform und des Zentralinstitutes für Formgestaltung sowie über weitere Maßnahmen zur Verbesserung der Industrieformgestaltung,” 26 September 1964, DF 7/2207, BAB.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

design. There was room for practical arguments that favored functionalism because of its more economical use of resources and production facilities objecting to the embellishments in Stalinist aesthetics. Eli Rubin argues that the Party realigned its aesthetics as early as 1953 with the events of June 17th.¹⁵⁴ Yet rather than a change in official policy, what one can detect here is a softening of aesthetic guidelines in practice, not in discourse. The Culture Department's conflict with the industrial designers about socialist cultural principles points to a (ideologically and discursively) well and vibrant Socialist Realism. It seems that a practical dilution of cultural Stalinism falls into the early 1960s, in correlation with Nikita Khrushchev's de-Stalinization during the Thaw.¹⁵⁵ Kelm became a member of the Council of Ministers in 1964 and advanced to a good standing with Erich Honecker, whose personal secretary was Kelm's wife. His minimalistic vision for interior design, however, was not yet trend-setting in the GDR. It took another decade until Kelm was able to design the interiors of Honecker's state guesthouses using nothing other than Bauhaus furniture.¹⁵⁶

Whereas East Germany experimented with different German styles in the first two postwar decades, the Federal Republic developed its national aesthetic slowly, continuously testing international reaction. International representation was at the core of

¹⁵⁴ Rubin, "The Form of Socialism," 158. Rubin proposes that the worker protests of June 17, 1953 marked the shift from cultural Stalinism to functionalism. However, the significance of the 1953 strikes in this context is not convincing. Leaving the path of Socialist Realism in 1953 seems a premature departure from the international communist agenda for a Soviet satellite state considering that even in the Soviet Union Stalinism was well alive until Nikita Khrushchev's Secret Speech in February 1956. Over the course of the decade, it became evident to the GDR government that representative wedding cake buildings, such as the houses on Stalinallee, were costly, work-intensive, and needed scarce resources, such as marble and hard wood. The turn to prefab housing blocks in the 1960s then was accompanied by a rethinking of the interior, including a general shift towards functionalist design.

¹⁵⁵ It should be noted that Ulbricht's personal taste for power delayed the Thaw in East Germany. See Loth, *Stalin's Unwanted Child*; Hope M. Harrison, *Driving the Soviets Up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953-1961* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

¹⁵⁶ Martin Kelm, in discussion with the author, 4 May 2009.

the Rat für Formgebung's mission and it took most of the 1950s until they arrived at a clear vision of their moral message. The design council dismissed the international style of *Nierentisch* organicism, which was very popular in West Germany, and instead created a design style that was grouped around functionalist principles. Tracking the aesthetic development from the 1954 Milan Triennial, the 1957 Milan Triennial, and the 1958 World Exposition in Brussels, one can see an increasing emphasis on humility and transparency distinct from the monumental architecture and folkloristic home design had become the aesthetic legacy of the Third Reich.¹⁵⁷ The number of arts and crafts objects shrunk while a growing number of industrial designed goods were put on display (see figure 4). Betts assesses this aesthetic as functionalism that blended old and new *Sachlichkeit*.¹⁵⁸ By the late 1950s, the materials featured in the German pavilion at Brussels were clean and modern, such as glass, tubular steel, concrete, and wood.¹⁵⁹ While eyed with suspicions by the national media, this new, subdued West German aesthetic won acclaim from the foreign press. Captivated by its "spiritual functionalism," the *London Times* hailed the German Pavilion at Brussels as elegant, transparent, and radiant.¹⁶⁰ West German simplicity, and, most importantly for its diplomatic value, openness won international recognition. These three groundbreaking exhibitions affirmed that the West German linkage between industrial design and antifascism worked in the

¹⁵⁷ For a detailed description of the German pavilion at Brussels see Aynsley, *Designing Modern Germany*, 156-161. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the Nazis did employ modernism for their own goals. During the Cold War however, the complexity of Nazi culture was deflated into essentially "blood and soil" pastoralism and anti-modernism. Betts, *Authority of Everyday Objects*, 187.

¹⁵⁸ Betts, *Authority of Everyday Objects*, 188.

¹⁵⁹ Correspondence between Eiermann, Seeger, Schneider, and G. v. Hartmann, May – August 1954, Hartmann Estate, Binder 13, DWB.

¹⁶⁰ "So urteilte die Welt," *Werk und Zeit*, vol. 6, no. 7 (1958), 7.

international arena, setting new standards for how West Germany utilized interior design and architecture to communicate its postwar identity.¹⁶¹

The work of the West German Rat für Formgebung, however, came to a complete standstill between 1964 and 1965. The government's uneasiness about cultural centralism limited the opportunities for unified industrial design in the West, a situation drastically different from the place that East Germany's design institutions held in its state apparatus. As early as 1960, as Christopher Oestereich has noted, the Federal Republic's government was reluctant to turn the design council into an exclusively public agency.¹⁶² Business involvement and private sponsoring remained a prerequisite for the continuation of the design council. Yet, with its existence threatened by the lack of governmental and industrial financial commitment, the president of the Rat für Formgebung, Ernst Schneider, acting also as the president of the BDI Arbeitskreis persuaded the designers in the institution that only a merger with the industry's Arbeitskreis could solve its financial and personnel crisis by showing a united front. In 1965 Schneider wrote to the Minister of Economics Kurt Schmücker (CDU, 1963-1966) regarding his conviction that the council would be able to tackle its growing challenges given a new organizational and financial basis. Schneider put the council's national significance in a global perspective: "The idea that the German Rat für Formgebung fulfills a socio-political function has been recognized as a state task and honored as such in the Federal Republic as well as in many

¹⁶¹ In successive years, this humility and transparency also found its way into state architecture. In 1962, Ludwig Erhard, new chancellor of the Federal Republic, chose Sep Ruf, co-designer of the Brussel pavilion, as the architect for the *Kanzlerbungalow*, the official residence of the chancellor in Bonn. Carola Ebert, "Into the Great Wide Open: The Modernist Bungalow in 1960's West Germany/Avaryyseihaalus. Modernistlik bangalo 1960. aastate Lääne-Saksamaal," in *Constructed Happiness: Domestic Environment in the Cold War Era/Võistlevad õnned: elukeskkond külma sõja perioodili*, ed. Mart Kalm and Ingrid Ruudi, compilation of a conference held at the Institute of Art History, Estonian Academy of Arts in Tallinn, May 20-22, 2004 (Tallinn: Trükk, 2005), 148.

¹⁶² Oestereich, "Gute Form" im Wiederaufbau, 298-299.

other industrial countries.”¹⁶³ But the government refused more funds pointing to the responsibility of the specific industries, which would financially benefit from the council’s work. With no bargaining power vis-à-vis the government, the council attempted to work the Cold War angle between East and West Germany to attain more state funding. Yet even comparisons with the GDR’s well-financed design institution apparently lacked political sway. The negotiations and mutual blaming resulted in a new constitution for the design council, in which the Arbeitskreis attained administrative control over the Rat für Formgebung. Werkbund members feared that the design council would be sidestepped and felt their cultural ideals betrayed by industry interests.

In June 1967, the Rat für Formgebung sent a report to the Ministry of Economics assessing different options for reorganization and extension of its responsibilities. The ministry, though, found that the work of the last three years had been ineffective (only two thirds of the budget was put to use in 1966 and likewise in 1967) and saw little promise for success in the changes proposed by the council. The Minister of Economics, Karl Schiller (SPD, 1966-1972), and his staff identified the council’s personnel structures as the true impediment for successful restructuring.¹⁶⁴ The personnel problems of the Design Council culminated in a public fall-out between the Werkbund and the BDI Arbeitskreis in 1968-9. The Werkbund maintained publicly that the Design Council had been “swallowed by the industry (*von der Industrie geschluckt worden*).” In a transition

¹⁶³ Ernst Schneider (president of RfF) to Bundesminister für Wirtschaft, 28 June 1965, B 102/151283, BAK.

¹⁶⁴ Britsch to Schiller, von Dohnanyi, Rat für Formgebung; Re: Denkschrift des RfF vom 8. Juni 1967, Besprechung bei Staatssekretär von Dohnanyi, 22 August 1968, B 102/151284, BAK.

period, the BDI and the Werkbund shared leadership in the council.¹⁶⁵ Yet, the Werkbund demanded a “complete institutional and personnel separation” from the Arbeitskreis and reassertion of the Rat für Formgebung’s democratic legitimacy.¹⁶⁶ Instead, the organizational structures, including Ernst Schneider’s joint presidency of both institutions, remained unchanged.¹⁶⁷ As a result, the Werkbund publicly stepped away from the design council in the summer of 1969. The Werkbund board of managers published a statement lamenting that “the Werkbund cannot identify with the Rat für Formgebung as it once had been able to” under the given circumstances.¹⁶⁸ The feeling was mutual. A promotional pamphlet that the design council produced two decades later in 1989 to inform the general public about its history made this evident by completely omitting the Werkbund’s integral role in the inception of the design council.¹⁶⁹

In a parallel development, functionalism as a socio-political and moral agenda underwent a crisis. The HfG Ulm presents a prime example of the institutional repercussions caused by this change in intellectual climate. Ulm, having developed a dogmatism of austerity that became its trademark for success in the years of want, suddenly faced strong public criticism, which became its eventual downfall during a period of increased consumption in the 1960s.¹⁷⁰ Situated on the Kuhberg Mountain, a hill overseeing the city, the school was not only physically, but also conceptually

¹⁶⁵ The disagreement between the Werkbund and the BDI is well documented in *werk und zeit*, vol. 17, no. 11, 1968; and vol. 18, no. 6/7, 1969.

¹⁶⁶ Max Peter Maass, “Was kann den Rat für Formgebung noch retten?,” *Darmstädter Tagblatt*, 29 May 1969.

¹⁶⁷ Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects*, 252.

¹⁶⁸ DWB Statement, 27 June 1969, Folder “Rat für Formgebung I,” DWB.

¹⁶⁹ Jochen Rahe (Chair of the board DWB Hessen e.V.) to Dieter Rams (RfF president), 5 May 1989, Folder “Rat für Formgebung/AOU I,” DWB.

¹⁷⁰ Dieter Rams and Hans Gugelot’s work for the radio company Braun is the most successful merging of Ulm’s functionalist dogmatism with industrial design. This collaboration broke with radio design conventions and was highly influential in shaping West German progressive aesthetics in consumer goods.

removed from the life of the people “below” them. The HfG Ulm nevertheless represented an institutional stronghold of die-hard functionalism that correlated with the Design Council’s aesthetic postwar vision for a liberal Federal Republic. Neglecting popular taste and consumer demands, Ulm found itself increasingly criticized in the press.¹⁷¹ Especially a highly critical article about the institute in the West German political magazine *Der Spiegel* caused the Baden-Württemberg government to review its financial commitment to the school.¹⁷² These tensions in the relationship between Ulm’s design principles and wider societal trends led to the loss of funding from the regional government in 1968 which resulted in the institute’s closing in November of that year. The criticism of Ulm was not a singular instance of popular critique vis-à-vis elite institutions in general and functionalism in particular.¹⁷³ 1967/68 saw worldwide social change that expressed the end of a democratic consensus, which in Germany the HfG Ulm and the Rat für Formgebung claimed to materially express in their functionalist aesthetics. The closing of the Ulm institute marked the disillusion with the reformist and moral power of functionalism as a distinct West German aesthetic.

Conclusion

Postwar Germany’s institutionalization of industrial design offers insights into more than the challenges of reconstruction. It also reflected larger concerns of the Cold War division: competition for cultural leadership in Germany, the alignment with the Western and Eastern Blocs respectively, and a way to create integrative concepts for

¹⁷¹ Heitmann, “Die Bauhaus-Rezeption in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland,” 134.

¹⁷² “Auf dem Kuhberg,” *Der Spiegel*, 20 March 1963, 71-75.

¹⁷³ See Betts, *Authority of Everyday Objects*, 174-176.

popular identification with the new states. Most successfully, though, it expressed a cultural policy of demarcation in the German Question, affirming that unification had moved out of reach. The subsequent aesthetics, functionalism in the West and *Gründerzeit* styles in the East, were thought of expressions of official national culture. However, the political means with which they approached this problem differed between the two German states. Party control in the East led to a system of personal patronage that suppressed a truly socialist conception of the material environment. Meanwhile, the Federal Republic's parliamentary debate and questions of state subsidies resulted in an associational battle for institutional control. These structural, financial, and political challenges contributed to watered-down versions of the initial institutional goals in the GDR and the Federal Republic alike. Whereas the initial commitment to a certain aesthetic became evident in the political battles won by cultural elites in the early 1950s, both the Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung and the Rat für Formgebung underwent drastic changes that did not stop short of ending aesthetic visions.

Having considered these specifics of the politicization and institutionalization of industrial design in postwar Germany, Walter Gropius' 1967 plea for institutionalized industrial design becomes more comprehensible. He reconnected with his home country at a time when domestic forces contested the legacy of the Bauhaus and the Werkbund movement. In the Federal Republic, the official financial commitment to the Institute of Design in Ulm and the Rat für Formgebung collapsed. Both strongholds of functionalist design suffered institutional blows exacerbated by the general crisis of functionalism in West Germany of the mid-1960s. At that time, the GDR aesthetics only began to develop into a modern direction. The ascent of functionalists like Kelm and Michel successively

hollowed out Socialist Realism from within the state apparatus, but until the mid-1960s, political elites held on to cultural Stalinism as official aesthetics in the East. Yet as the reconstruction years came to an end, the protest movements of 1968 challenged the political purity that functionalism had occupied in the West and the Prague Spring disillusioned true believers in communism in the East. These events put two decades of overcoming the Nazi past and German-German demarcation into question.

CHAPTER 2: INDUSTRIAL DESIGN AND THE GERMAN QUESTION'S SOCIAL DIMENSION

Introduction

At a time when Germany was in the process of democratizing itself, the Werkbund initiative for a design council was only one attempt among many to find an all-German (*gesamtdeutsche*) aesthetic. Werkbund member Wilhelm Wagenfeld, one of Germany's most influential Bauhaus-trained designers who had recently left the East, initiated a similar institution in the new state of Baden-Württemberg.¹⁷⁴ In this context, he warned the state administration in 1949: "I am from Berlin and, therefore, from the Germany beyond the zone border. I have seen that we can counter the East only with a new intellectual world and, thus, with new social empathy [*neues soziales Empfinden*] and thinking."¹⁷⁵ Wagenfeld understood the intellectual appeal of socialism as he himself held leftist political views and had remained loyal to the Werkbund mission that promoted designers' social responsibility. Most importantly though, by suggesting that Western material culture was inscribed with moral meaning, Wagenfeld opened up a new way of thinking about design in the context of the German Question. Specifically, he pointed to the need for a deeper rethinking of social and cultural structures to counter the lure of socialist material collectivism. At the same time, his remarks show that industrial design became a competitive field in the German Cold War, which contoured the West German discourse in contrast to the quickly developing socialist alternative in the East.

¹⁷⁴ One of the few industrial designers who had continuously worked during the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich as well as postwar Germany, he left an impressive body of work ranging from lamp designs to glassware. Throughout these decades he stayed true to his leftist politics, which he openly displayed in his extensive written work about the relationship between design and society. Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects*, 79.

¹⁷⁵ Wagenfeld to Baden-Württemberg Minister of Economics Veit, quoted in Oestereich, "*Gute Form*" im *Wiederaufbau*, 285.

More than a loose assemblage of voices, discourse between politicians, designers and cultural critics grappled with the meaning of these aesthetics in the everyday. In the early reconstruction years, elites had focused on pronounced national aesthetics for political rather than social purposes. Alongside the cultural identification with the West, such aesthetics expressed Adenauer's "policy of strength" on the German Question, based on the logic that *Westbindung*, rearmament and membership in the NATO would eventually bring about German unification. In reaction to Bonn's position, the GDR followed a policy of demarcation from the West by showing allegiance to the Eastern Bloc both ideologically and culturally. However, when one examines design discourse beyond initial bloc alliances, it becomes evident that the ideologically loaded Cold War climate limited the elite's ability to inscribe material culture with a spirit of social reform.

To understand how material necessity related to social ideas, this analysis of German design discourse under capitalism and socialism is interested in the actual communication of aesthetic principles to the population. While the Federal Republic tied large parts of its material culture to the Werkbund reform ideals of the interwar years, the philosophical underpinnings of this aesthetic were lost on many onlookers. Meanwhile, the GDR reached back to the late nineteenth century, a time of stark social stratification, expansionism, and aesthetics reminiscent of Prussian classicism. However, while GDR politicians and designers tried to inscribe material culture with socialist humanist values, the systemic political and economic centralization effort soon overshadowed any philosophical interest in a more humane material environment. How did the two German states and their cultural representatives navigate these contradictions on a discursive level? What did these prescriptive visions of domestic modernity mean for the

populations' everyday life as an integral part of cultural rebirth? More specifically, did Germans still know how to live in their homes, rather than to purely inhabit them? These concerns became a pivotal point of the German public discourse, centering on the place of emotions in opposition to rationality and technological progress that came with economic modernization. The decoration of interiors in particular featured in the discourse of emotional reaction to shapes and colors in material culture. Theoretically, privacy and emotionality replaced the public "aesthetics of power" of 1930s Nazi Germany.¹⁷⁶ Yet this personal dimension of official design aesthetic faded into the background as larger questions of economic reconstruction and delineation in the German Question became more urgent.

Social Discomfort of Reconstruction Design

Wagenfeld's warning to the Baden-Württemberg administration echoed West German intellectuals' early anti-fascist campaigns for a complete break with the German past. Their vision included an alternative material and social philosophy in West Germany, one that stood in opposition to the so-called war-mongering forces of nationalism and capitalism. Coming from the left political spectrum, they envisioned a social revolution, which would give birth to a humanized, non-Marxist Germany in the middle of a united Europe. These intellectuals saw the potential for cultural rebirth in Germany through the young generation and "its perceived condition of alienation from

¹⁷⁶ The aesthetics of power in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union under Stalin have been excellently explained in the exhibition catalogue *Berlin – Moskau, 1900-1959* (Munich: Prestel, 1995).

the German past.”¹⁷⁷ Yet this radical new beginning did not occur. The Weimar generation took control in Bonn, marginalized the antifascists, and established a capitalist economic system with the help of the Western Allies. In turn, they brought with them aesthetics that evoked the cultural elitism of their interwar prime. Aesthetics, then, became just another issue where the political leadership both avoided a confrontation with the legacy of the Third Reich and ignored the opportunity for necessary socio-cultural remaking of Germany.

The West German Bauhaus Debate in 1953 reflected similar concerns in the realm of architecture. Church architect Rudolf Schwarz started the debate when he rejected Bauhaus rationalism for the rebuilding of Germany.¹⁷⁸ He targeted especially radically leftist practices and avant-garde projects, while promoting a conservative “modernism of the middle.”¹⁷⁹ These ideas, however, were hardly new and Schwarz attacks failed because his contemporaries recognized his arguments from political battles that had been fought over the closing of the Bauhaus in the Third Reich.¹⁸⁰ However, participants in the 1950s discourse on architecture and design developed an underlying uneasiness about functionalism as a revisionist official aesthetic. The debate evolved around the digression of functionalism from a social program aimed at reforming societal stratification through material uplift into an iconic form, a style that covered up persisting social relationships. As Frederic J. Schwartz noted, in the public sphere of the FRG, Bauhaus modernism

¹⁷⁷ A. Dirk Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 42.

¹⁷⁸ Thilo Hilpert, “The Postwar Dispute in West Germany: The Renewal of Rationalism,” in *Bauhaus Conflicts, 1919-2009*, ed. Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 129.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 132-135.

¹⁸⁰ Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects*, 85.

served as shorthand for everything that National Socialism opposed.¹⁸¹ Accordingly, this invention offered postwar designers safe aesthetic references that distinguished West Germany culturally from the Third Reich. On the one hand, this enabled both theoreticians and practitioners of design to circumvent any serious consideration of social function. However, functionalism's association with an untainted past made it difficult for the intellectual elite to critique the aesthetic and its political utilization. Associated with western democratic values, Schwartz concludes, Bauhaus aesthetics left the FRG without the necessary reference points, concepts or terminology to move beyond its past.¹⁸² Caught between its history and the communist alternative in the East, West Germany faced more than a rhetorical problem – the discourse warranted a new language that carried social significance.

The lack of a material philosophy informed by the social dimension greatly affected the way West German design politicians communicated the everyday merits of official postwar domestic culture. Early exhibitions struggled to persuade the population that they should welcome functionalist furniture into their homes. A pragmatic terminology developed that had no social reference point, but rather echoed wartime appeals for perseverance. One of the first exhibitions that proposed a new West German *Wohnkultur* went up in Stuttgart in 1949. How to dwell? (*wie wohnen?*) was a collaboration of the regional Werkbund with the local chamber of commerce. Acknowledging popular ambitions of home ownership in his contribution to the exhibition catalog, the chamber's deputy president wrote: "A house for the family is the

¹⁸¹ Frederic J. Schwartz, " 'Funktionalismus heute': Adorno, Bloch und das Erbe des Modernismus der BRD," in *Mythos Bauhaus: Zwischen Selbsterfindung und Enthistorisierung*, Anja Baumhoff und Magdalena Droste, eds. (Berlin: Reimer, 2009), 320-321.

¹⁸² Ibid.

dream of many. Rightfully so! A people that cultivates domestic culture does not give up on itself.”¹⁸³ Given postwar reality of bombed out urban areas, however, the attentive reader also learned that, for the time being, Germans had to content themselves with smaller apartments. “The occurring changes require completely different things. [...] The small apartment is not transitional, it is constant.”¹⁸⁴ The hardships of the changed housing situation engendered nostalgia for a comfortable past that the war had put out of reach. In an effort to make their new apartments feel like home, many West Germans acquired furnishings that reminded them of better times, much to the disdain of design politicians. Their consumption choices, guided by sentimentality rather than the actual limitations of the postwar situation, only confirmed the Werkbund in its task of regulating consumption. Advancing a practical attitude toward furnishings, the exhibition catalog promoted the advantages of modern materials such as glass, metal and plastics in furniture design. To illustrate their point, the organizers chose Egon Eiermann’s wicker chair. A light but uncomfortable piece, Eiermann’s chair would be featured in the German pavilion at the Brussels World Exposition years later in 1958, to embody this break with an iconic past.

Rather than embracing the challenge of instilling material culture with the means for reform, even Werkbund members, once firm in the terminology of social uplift, struggled to describe any underlying welfare concepts of West Germany’s striving *Wohnkultur*. In anticipation of the 1957 Interbau architecture exposition in Berlin, a

¹⁸³ Josef Alfons Thuma, “Einiges zur Frage ‘wie wohnen?’,” in *Gedanken und Bilder zur Ausstellung ‘wie wohnen: Bautechnik, Möbel, Hausrat,’* Stuttgart-Karlsruhe 1949-1950 (Stuttgart, Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1950). “Das Einfamilienhaus bleibt der Wunschtraum vieler. Zu Recht! Ein Volk, das die Wohnkultur pflegt, gibt sich nicht auf.”

¹⁸⁴ Schnellback, “Möbel.”

milestone in international modern public housing construction, the *Rat für Formgebung* showed the furnishings for one of the projected apartments at H55, an interior design summit in Swedish Hälsingborg. Instead of explaining how the exhibited solutions would improve living conditions for the masses, however, some Werkbund members voiced frustration with the exhibition's limitations that had resulted in the jury's design choices. For example, Mia Seeger limited her description of the presented interior design solutions to the fact that both the exhibition space and the requirement to display exclusively serially manufactured products had restricted the German committee to space-saving furniture.¹⁸⁵

With her professional expertise, Seeger should have been able to articulate the new West German social outlook in design, had there been one. At Erhard's request, Seeger became a member of the *Rat für Formgebung* in 1951 and became its first executive manager of in 1954.¹⁸⁶ She had earned her place as an organizer and juror among progressive architects and designers during a long assistantship with the Stuttgart Werkbund office before the Second World War.¹⁸⁷ However, her expertise only underscored the social ignorance of West German domestic culture in the H55 catalog.

¹⁸⁵ Mia Seeger, *Deutsche Wohnung. Ausstellung Hälsingborg H55*, 1955, Werkbundarchiv, ADO 7-1615/55.

¹⁸⁶ One of the first projects that Mia Seeger completed with the support of the design council structures was the four-volume opus *Deutsche Warenkunde* (published between 1955 and 1961), which she co-edited with Stephan Hirzel. This project continued and updated the 1915 *Deutsches Warenbuch* of the Werkbund, one of the first collections of German manufactured wares that embodied the simplified, functionalist aesthetic of *Gute Form*.

¹⁸⁷ The *Weissenhof Siedlung* (Weissenhof Settlement), a modernist architecture and interior design exhibition outside Stuttgart, was her first project of international significance in 1927. At Weissenhof she worked with architects of international acclaim, such as Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, El Lissitzky, and Ernst May. In 1930, Seeger organized the German exhibitions at the Société Artistes Décorateurs in the Paris Grand Palais in collaboration with the director of the Bauhaus Walter Gropius and helped designing the German presentation at the Milan Triennials of 1930 and 1936. Karin Kirsch, "Mia Seeger 1903-1991." Elisabeth Nölle-Neumann, ed. *Baden-Württembergische Portraits. Frauengestalten aus fünf Jahrhunderten* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2000), 247-254.

Other European countries, particularly in Scandinavia, were much more advanced in respect to public housing and general welfare. In comparison, the West German application of interwar modernism looked insubstantial. It had lost the reform component that once propelled the members of New Objectivity and Neues Bauen to the top ranks of Europe's leftist visionaries.

German intellectuals from the political left, motivated by the general population's rising concerns about capitalism's shortcomings over the course of the 1960s, reignited the critique of its material markers. The Cold War's escalating arms race and the politics of nuclear deterrence had shown that trade and collective prosperity failed to fulfill the promise of world peace.¹⁸⁸ Modernist design began to stand for this failure of a humanistic capitalist order. In his 1965 critique of "functionalism Today" at the annual Werkbund conference, leftist philosopher Theodor Adorno discussed the emptiness of postwar modernism.¹⁸⁹ He historicized the functionalist rejection of ornamentation, emphasizing that one era's indispensable design feature could easily turn into obsolete ornamentation for the next generation.¹⁹⁰ To Adorno, its negative historicism uncovered functionalism as a political dogma. The prescriptive idea inherent in functionalism, the defined relationship between form and utility, Adorno argued, rendered the functionalist object "unfree." To include society into the process of cultural reinscription, he suggested to open up materiality to unknown functions, thus yielding more humane objects.

¹⁸⁸ For a discussion of the effects of nuclear deterrence policy in Cold War society see Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 7-43.

¹⁸⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, "Funktionalismus heute," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Rolf Tiedemann, ed. (Suhrkamp, 2005).

¹⁹⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, "Funktionalismus heute," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Rolf Tiedemann, ed. (Suhrkamp, 2005), 8.016.

As the debate continued, the design periodical *Form* published a series of articles that became increasingly critical of functionalism over the following years. This discourse highlighted some decisive shortcomings in the first inception of functionalism. One fundamental problem was that the designers considered to have fathered functionalism, Henri Labrouste and Louis Sullivan, who coined the term “Form follows function,” had never actually defined what function meant: the practicable, the useful or the technically optimized?¹⁹¹ On closer examination, functionalism started to look more like an ideology than an aesthetic truth. Contributors to this design discourse demanded the sacrifice of the “sacred cows” of functionalism. By 1969, the *Form* pronounced “grandpa’s functionalism” dead.¹⁹²

The legacy of functionalism’s shaky foundation, however, did not end here. The Weimar designer generation’s inability to address the social function of design multiplied through its teaching, thereby created generations of “socially unconscious” designers. Germany’s only educational institution founded on the assumption that material culture necessarily represented political consciousness, the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm, closed its doors in 1968. Even if the school had remained open, its functionalist dogmatism had lost its attraction by the late 1960s.¹⁹³ In the first postwar generation, many industrial designers had a practical background in the crafts. Rolf Heide, one of the

¹⁹¹ Robert Twombly, ed., *Louis Sullivan: The Public Papers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), xii.

¹⁹² Abraham A. Moles, “Die Krise des Funktionalismus,” *Form* 41/1968, 36; Werner Nehls, “Die heiligen Kühe des Funktionalismus müssen geopfert werden,” *Form* 43/1968, 4; Hartmut Seeger, “Funktionalismus im Rückspiegel des Design, ibid., 10-11; Gerda Müller-Krauspe, “Opas Funktionalismus ist tot – Der Standort des Industrial Design – gestern, heute und morgen,” *Form* 46/1969, 29-32. See also Betts’ discussion of Adorno and the demise of functionalism. Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects*, 254-257.

¹⁹³ Ulm rigidity, nonetheless, had a tremendous influence on German material culture. Among others, the school collaborated with the electric appliance producer Braun, designed the corporate identity of the German national airline Lufthansa as well as the elevated trains for the City of Hamburg.

most influential neo-functionalists in Germany to date, began his career in 1950 as a cabinet-maker.¹⁹⁴ He studied architecture at the Muthesiusschule in Kiel, which was named after one of the Werkbund founders Hermann Muthesius. His colleague Peter Maly followed a similar path.¹⁹⁵ When asked about the social vision behind their designs, both responded that a consideration of social function was not important to their design process. Rather, they made things to be beautiful, not socially responsible.¹⁹⁶ Maly and Heide embodied the absence of a social philosophy in the West German discourse on material culture.

At the end of the 1960s, it becomes clear that functionalism, with its fetishization of geometric forms, had been uncovered as being inherently production oriented, while ignoring the consumer. At the same time that Bonn withdrew its commitment to the Rat für Formgebung, the FRG grew unable to conceal its decision to follow a less humane economic program. In an effort to salvage the national functional aesthetic, the debate moved on to consider Adorno's proposed extended functionalism (*erweiterter Funktionalismus*), one that designs objects to serve humanity rather than maltreat it with sharp edges.¹⁹⁷ Wagenfeld had worried that the Federal Republic on its path toward capitalism would lose sight of the significance of materiality. This concern had not only manifested itself in the language of functionality, but also multiplied through the teachings of his contemporaries. To theoreticians and practitioners of design, these

¹⁹⁴ Josef Kremerskothen, "Wohnen wie noch nie," in *Rolf Heide – Designer, Architekt, Querdenker*, ed. Dirk Meyhöfer (Ludwigsburg: Avedition, 2000), 13.

¹⁹⁵ He entered his cabinet-maker apprenticeship in 1955 and later moved on to study at the technical college for interior design in Detmold. Josef Kremerskothen, "Wegstücke," in *Peter Maly, Designermonographien* 5, ed. Alex Buck and Matthias Vogt (Frankfurt a.M.: Form, 1998), 18.

¹⁹⁶ Peter Maly in discussion with the author, 6 May 2009. Rolf Heide in discussion with the author, 5 May 2009.

¹⁹⁷ See Adorno, "Funktionalismus heute," 8.024; Hartmut Seeger, "Syntaktik und Semantik," *Form* 46/1969, 34-36.

conclusions presented a disillusioning bottom line to two decades of reconstruction discourse and its failure to instill West German material culture with an agenda that stood for human improvement. Any motivation to think about the human aspect of design, it seemed, originated from the socialist German alternative across the border.

Within socialism, designers intrinsically considered how their designs improved the human condition. At the center stood the new socialist man and his material environment, a theoretical and practical challenge for socialist societies since the constructivism of the 1920s. Yet in the case of the German postwar socialism, the line between collectivist theory and individualistic practice was blurred. West German economic success, along with the legitimacy that the Federal Republic derived from it, forced the GDR to soft-peddle on the question of consumer goods in order to convince the population of the merits of socialism.

In an effort to culturally align with the Soviet Union and to differentiate itself from the Federal Republic, Ulbricht purged Weimar modernism and its disciples from cultural and educational institutions between 1951 and 1954. The “Formalism Debate” established a cultural consensus supportive of German cultural heritage, in contrast to “artless and cosmopolitan” modernism in the West. While Socialist Realism became the main artistic expression in the GDR, its backwardness often produced products that taste reformer Horst Michel described as Kitsch. In the applied arts, historical styles such as Rococo, Classicism, and Biedermeier inspired the cultural rebirth of the East German state. This style also favored ornamentation over functionality and hygiene – an especially important aspect for household wares. After dealing with the scarcity of furniture in the late 1940s, the 1950s reintroduced personal comfort (*Behaglichkeit*) into

the discourse.¹⁹⁸ Kitsch and petty-bourgeois coziness (*Gemütlichkeit*) were privileged over economic considerations and production ethics. His self-appointed mission to provide the GDR with honest, unassuming designs seemed jeopardized by the very policies that the Party decreed. From the beginning, Michel was at odds with the new culture doctrine. Already in late 1950, he stated that “the person who buys Rococo china in 1950 shows bad taste.”¹⁹⁹ He reiterated this position in 1952 at the first conference for interior design at the Deutsche Bauakademie: “This [cultural policy] cannot end in providing “princely” furniture to the working people. We shouldn’t talk them into things that look like bourgeois riches, instead we need to give them real riches that serve humanity.”²⁰⁰

With such a contrary view on socialist material culture, it is somewhat surprising that Michel remained an influential figure of national importance. His work gained recognition abroad in 1957 when the West German *Institut für neue technische Form* in Darmstadt organized an exhibition that featuring the designs of Michel and his Weimar colleagues. West German designers perceived Weimar’s designs as the East’s “return” to functional shapes, celebrating the emergence of a “functionalist German style” on both sides of the German-German border.²⁰¹ However, this was a premature celebration of a shared aesthetics. At the Culture Conference of 1957, the SED renewed the claim for a “socialist-realist culture.” It declared cultural work a political mass phenomenon for the

¹⁹⁸ “Fortschrittliche Möbelkultur – behagliches Wohnen und gute Arbeit,” *Berliner Zeitung*, Special Edition for the 1950 Leipzig Fair, 27 August – 1 September 1950.

¹⁹⁹ Horst Michel, “Verbindung von Zweck und Anmut. Sinn und Unsinn unseres Gebrauchsgeräts,” In *Nationalzeitung* (Berlin Ost), 15 October 1950.

²⁰⁰ Michel cit. after J.W. “Möbel als Ausdruck unseres Kulturwillens,” in *Nationalzeitung*, 6 June 1952 (Berlin Ost), n.p.

²⁰¹ Petra Eisele, “Ist Geschmack Glücksache? Horst Michel und das Weimarer Institut für Innengestaltung,” in *Horst Michel – DDR-Design. Tagungsband zum Kolloquium*, ed. Petra Eisele and Siegfried Gronert (Weimar: Universitätsverlag, 2004), 46.

working population, a view contrary to the elitism in the West. The following year the political leadership connected cultural renewal with its economic goals and “declared” a cultural revolution for the victory of socialism at the fifth SED Party Congress 1958 in East Berlin.

In the spring of the following year, the Bitterfeld Conference, a conference of writers with representatives of the government, the Party, workers, and the intelligentsia, discussed the prospects of assimilating workers and peasants into Socialist Realism. A resulting politico-cultural program that aimed at overcoming the previous detachment between the arts and workers became known as the *Bitterfelder Weg*.²⁰² This new attitude diffused through all areas of the state, even the economy. By holding official industrial design competitions across industrial sectors, economic planners attempted to include the working people in the process of finding a socialist culture that corresponded to the needs and taste of the population.²⁰³ In this way, they believed, waste and kitsch would be avoided. At Bitterfeld, Ulbricht himself spoke about the evils of kitsch, calling it the “heritage of capitalism,” implying that profit-oriented mass production ignored cultural responsibility.²⁰⁴ In the same vein, Michel wrote the pamphlet *The Industrial Designer on the Bitterfeld Path (Der Industrieformgestalter auf dem Bitterfelder Weg)*, in which he criticized the lack of cooperation between designers and workers in socialist production. Arguing that only the laborers truly knew their needs, Michel maintained that the state

²⁰² Anna Pfitzner, “Wer dirigiert hier? Kultursendungen im Deutschen Fernsehfunk vom 13. Bis 19. August 1961,” *Der Mauerbau 1961 im Hörfunk und Fernsehen der DDR*, URL: <http://1961.dra.de/index.php?id=24> accessed 8/23/2011.

²⁰³ Ministry for Light Industries, *Aufruf zum Wettbewerb zur Erlangung von Entwürfen auf der Grundlage des Ministerratsbeschlusses vom 12.1.1954*, 11764/2222, SSiD; DDR Presse-Informationen, 17 January 1984, B102/284972-2, BAK.

²⁰⁴ Pfitzner, “Wer dirigiert hier? Kultursendungen im Deutschen Fernsehfunk vom 13. Bis 19. August 1961.”

should rely on them to eliminate the production of “commodities that do not comply with our *Zeitgeist*. Bourgeois kitsch, modernist Formalism, decadence and snobbism are not befitting for us.”²⁰⁵ The *Bitterfelder Weg* pursued a more holistic approach to mass production, implying the possibility of responsible socialist manufacturing.

Meanwhile, economic planners struggled with the implications of economic socialism for the consumption of the population. This discourse developed parallel to the cultural debates at the Bitterfeld Conference and tried to bring centralization, rationalization, and standardization in line with the level of cultural significance that Ulbricht had required. Fearing that a rigid restructuring of production would flatten the cultural value in socialist materiality, the question of how to retain a “domestic culture despite standardization” arose.²⁰⁶ At the occasion of the first standardization show in Leipzig in 1959-1960, the GDR interior design journal *Kultur im Heim* initiated a prophylactic discussion to combat the impression that standardization would necessarily lead to uniform apartment furnishings.²⁰⁷ Alongside pictures of the first standardized living room furniture sets, the journal asked its readers “Would you have guessed that these are standardized pieces?” However, no matter how tasteful the execution, standardization and assortment streamlining (*Sortimentsbereinigung*) logically resulted in limited choices for consumers.

To quell consumer discontent, the Zentralinstitut needed to justify the monotony caused by standardization. By introducing leftist cultural intellectual Giulio Carlo Argan

²⁰⁵ Michel, *Der Industrieformgestalter auf dem Bitterfelder Weg*, Institut für Innengestaltung an der Hochschule für Architektur und Bauwesen Weimar (Weimar: Buch- und Kunstdruckerei Johannes Keipert, n.d.), 7.

²⁰⁶ M.P., “Wohnraumkultur trotz Standardisierung?” *Kultur im Heim*, 1/1960, 3.

²⁰⁷ “Ist Standard gleich uniform?” *Kultur im Heim*, 1/1960, 4.

into the debate, designers and policymakers tried to reconcile the paradox of uniformity with individuality. Designer and Zentralinstitut employee Ekkehard Bartsch quoted Argan's formalistic critique of Weimar modernity, stating "when industry exclusively reproduced shapes that were meant for crafts, that is as singular pieces, monotony resulted from the repetition of these formal specialties." On the contrary, he argued, standardization celebrated the generalized shape because "the machine has no other job than to make a thousand pieces of it" and thus "identity and not uniformity results, because every object will keep the character of an original."²⁰⁸ According to this interpretation, uniformity was only present in form because of its assigned function. Identity, on the other hand, was inherent in standardization, because it was left to the owner to ascribe a product's specific function, thus leaving the object to fulfill individual expectations:

The individual can develop freely and creatively only on the basis of standardized production. Only when humans stop seeing the fruits of their material ambitions as a marker of their social status and attitude will they finally be able to benefit from technological innovation. Products become real servants of his [*sic*] existence, he himself stands in the center, not his supporting equipment.²⁰⁹

This position had much in common with Adorno's suggestion for an extended functionalism that considered the human being. In other words, the FRG and the GDR faced very different challenges in changing social relations through material culture, but, by the mid-1960s, they arrived at similar ways of thinking about the place of objects in industrial society.

²⁰⁸ Giulio Carlo Argan as quoted by Ekkehard Bartsch, "Standardisierung – Vielfalt – Formgestaltung," *Form und Zweck*, 2/1965, 9. Quoted from Giulio Carlo Argan, *Gropius und das Bauhaus* (1962), 31.

²⁰⁹ Ekkehard Bartsch, "Standardisierung – Vielfalt – Formgestaltung," *Form und Zweck*, 2/1965, 12.

In practice, however, GDR planners and designers soon realized that the production and efficiency-oriented organization of mass serial production rendered a small number of furniture models ubiquitous. This, in turn, led to the feared “moral deterioration” (“*moralischer Verschleiß*”) of the individual designs and thus a loss of their cultural identity.²¹⁰ The challenge here was to find a happy medium between industrial productivity and socio-cultural demands. It was neither in the interest of the GDR leadership nor its goal to make public and private life entirely uniform – the GDR always wanted to keep the appearance of a dictatorship with a human face.

A concept for a GDR design retrospective under the working title “From Bauhaus to Bitterfeld” (*Vom Bauhaus bis Bitterfeld*) attempted to describe design around 1960. Yet even the design politicians involved in these decisions could not sufficiently explain the ambiguity of GDR design politics of the early 1960s, because of the blurry line between official design verdict and production reality.²¹¹ While the diversity of permissible forms increased again, some formal, if arbitrary, limits continued to exist, as the later generation of designer discovered. They unsuccessfully tried to make sense of

²¹⁰ Interview with Horst Heyder, “Erfahrungen,” *Form und Zweck*, 5/1979, 22.

²¹¹ This change in official style in the GDR coincided with Soviet rationalizing campaign of the 1960s, the so-called *byt* (everyday) campaigns. According to Victor Buchli, the eradication of petit-bourgeois furniture as “vestiges of the capitalist past hindering the development of late socialism” became one of the central aims of Khrushchev’s rationalizing reforms. *Byt* reformers distributed household advice manuals to improve the population’s taste. Thus Stalinist excess could be adequately contained by means of this disciplining regime of taste. The reform goal was to encourage more acceptable socialist behavior that would conform with socialist ontology through taste education. many people brought their old furniture into new infrastructures which frustrated reformers. Thus, the manuals contained do-it-yourself advice to alter the vestiges of petit-bourgeois living to conform to the reformist principles of the levelled domestic landscape. Chopping off the backs of divans and lowering bed frames or disposing completely of such bourgeois furniture were recommended measures to guarantee the horizontality of the home Victor Buchli, “Khrushchev, Modernism, and the Fight against ‘Petit-bourgeois’ Consciousness in the Soviet Home,” *Journal of Design History* 10, no. 2, Design, Stalin and the Thaw. (1997): 161-170. Aesthetics as a fundamental building bloc for debates about de-Stalinization are also discussed by Susan Reid, “De-stalinization and Taste,” *Journal of Design History* 10, no. 2, Design, Stalin and the Thaw. (1997): 177-201.

official disdain for designer Hubert Petras cylindrical, plain white vases, which had been exhibited at the fifth Dresden Art Exhibition in 1962: “The strict, compromise-less cylinder shapes delineated themselves from shallow industrial mass production. Yet officials agreed that they run counter to the optimistic attitude towards life of a civilized people with a happy future.”²¹² Each object thus was judged on its own merit, without considering the context. Only in 1965 did the Zentralinstitut put on an exhibition that featured multiple objects in completed interior design settings. Titled *Modern Dwellings* (*Modernes Wohnen*) the exhibition constituted an experiment in Hoyerswerda, Saxony. Furniture that had come under scrutiny in the 1950s, such as Hellerau’s Model 602, was prominently featured in the display.²¹³ Sponsored by the Zentralinstitut, the 15,000 visitors saw the exhibition for free. For the first time in a decade, their opinions were not only recorded, but also coveted to evaluate the success of the new, holistic exhibition concept. Not so surprisingly, the modern way of living found broad acceptance, but the limited availability of the displayed products frustrated the population.²¹⁴ As the increasingly centralized economy tried to catch up in the realm of consumer goods in the 1960s, exhibitions presented material possibility instead of reality. People in rural areas understood the modern lifestyle from an aesthetic and practical point of view, yet the markers of progression remained largely unavailable.

²¹² DWB exhibition “Vom Bauhaus bis Bitterfeld,” Frankfurt a.M., December 1990, n.d. “Ausstellungen AIF, diverse Fotos,” Sammlung industrielle Gestaltung [hereafter referred to as SiG].

²¹³ Abschlussbericht zur Ausstellung “Modernes Wohnen” in Hoyerswerda, Tiergartenmuseum, 8 November 1965, “Ausstellungen AIF, diverse Fotos,” SiG.

²¹⁴ Folder, 1965 Ausstellung “Modernes Wohnen” Hoyerswerda, Zentralinstitut für Formgestaltung, 1965, Ausstellungen AIF, diverse Fotos,” SiG. These visitor comments echoed the sentiment expressed at an exhibition that the Zentralinstitut organized in Neubrandenburg earlier that year. Folder, Ausstellung “Form” Neubrandenburg, Zentralinstitut für Formgestaltung, 1965, Ausstellungen AIF, diverse Fotos,” SiG.

After years of fighting kitschy ornamentation and outdated lavish designs, the turn in cultural policy from Socialist Realism to modern idioms confronted taste reformers such as Michel with the opposite extreme – fashionable and modish designs that outlived their aesthetic lifespan within a few years. In response, Michel shifted from criticizing backward-looking stylistic historicism to warning against exaggerated originality and avant-gardism. Michel reiterated his concerns in 1964 on the occasion of the Zentralinstitut's reorganization under the roof of the DAMW, which included the implementation of standardized design criteria for technological product evaluation. Pointing out that quality in mass production was difficult to maintain, he rejected the argument advanced by producers and retail that “products are designed badly because of popular taste and demand.”²¹⁵ The guest books of the aforementioned exhibition attest to the fact that at least parts of the population liked modernist-inspired designs. Though Michel acknowledged the sincerity behind this line of argument, he suggested that until this point the efforts undertaken to achieve better designs were insufficient. After all, “in every type of taste, in every style, tasteless products exist. It is the task of the designer to create something decent in every individual or seasonally conditioned taste.”²¹⁶ Rejecting doctrinaire one-sidedness that favored a specific style or slavishly followed official cultural policies, Michel saw material socialism play out in the relationship between the product and its user. His plea for moderation as a guiding concept in a country that tried to propel its economy forward with centralization and Five-Year Plans, though, did not

²¹⁵ Horst Michel, “Forderungen an den Gestalter von Industrieprodukten für den Wohnbereich,” in Zentralinstitut für Formgestaltung (ed.), *Informationen Rat für Industrieform* Nr. 2, Berlin 1964, 13.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

align well with communist ambitions for membership among the leading industrial nations.

Toward the end of the decade, GDR design politicians fully embraced the leftist politics of interwar modernism. To honor the 1968 twenty-year anniversary of the state's founding, the Zentralinstitut organized an exhibition that put GDR design at the intersection of the Bauhaus/Werkbund tradition and Soviet constructivism. The historical section addressed a range of artistic expressions that the GDR designers saw themselves indebted to: 1840-1895 historicism and eclecticism, 1895-1915 arts and crafts reform movements and stylistic art such as Art Nouveau and Neoclassicism, and finally 1918-1933 New Objectivity, Expressionism, and Functionalism.²¹⁷ This exhibition plan was the first to list the latter two among the roots of socialist design in East Germany and paid special attention to the leftist politics of some of its protagonists. In contrast to the West Germany, the social program of interwar modernism fit right into the GDR discourse on a socialist way of life.²¹⁸

With the abolition of Socialist Realism as artistic maxim, the Zentralinstitut's internal communication shifted course from cultural definitions to questions of socialist scientific progress in the 1960s and 1970s.²¹⁹ The main prerequisite in the institute's work remained the improvement and design of the socialist way of life within the GDR, but technological and economic considerations took over. Walter Ulbricht laid out the agenda in his presentation on "Basic Tasks for the Year 1970" accordingly: "The quality

²¹⁷ Konzeption der Ausstellung „Gestaltete Umwelt für den Menschen“ zum 20. Jahrestag der Gründung der DDR 1969, 1 February 1968, "Ausstellungen AIF, diverse Fotos," SiG.

²¹⁸ Betts, "Building Socialism at Home."

²¹⁹ See for example Statement regarding the implementation of additional permanent positions for the Central Institute for Design, not signed, n. d., DF 7/2207, BAB; AiF conception division research and development, 22 July 1974, DF 7/197, BAB.

of housing influences work productivity and development of the socialist identity. People reproduce their labor mainly in housing areas. With the evolution of a socialist mode of life, though, qualitatively new demands on housing develop.”²²⁰ The design of the home and of kitchen furniture was to be purposeful and pragmatic in order to free up time to do “more pleasant and useful things, such as cultural activities or educating ourselves.”²²¹ Nonetheless, some aesthetic concerns joined this practical approach to the housing environment: “Bad shape and color effects of tools, home textiles or furniture limit our joy of habitation.”²²² The government thus understood the home to be an important part of the workers’ state, a place of recuperation and recovery from and for work as well as a locus for self-improvement -- socialist aesthetic concepts were thought to greatly enhance these processes. Yet the Party continued to fail in providing a clear definition of everyday needs for a “socialist way of life.” Determining these markers of socialist life was left to the Zentralinstitut and later the Amt für Formgestaltung, which approached the problem through research as their assignment was to “influence the scientific determination of requirements in future living in order to create the basis for future designs of the living environment.”²²³ By turning the aesthetic reconstitution of East German material culture into a scientific experiment, the GDR aligned its conception of the human environment with its general scientific-economic interpretation of socialism. At the same time, it caught up with Khrushchev’s rationalization of the Soviet everyday, which proclaimed

²²⁰ AiF Memo, n. d., DF 7/00198, BAB.

²²¹ AiF Memo, 26.4.1978, DF 7/00198, BAB.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Conception of research and development in the AiF, 18 February 1975, DF 7/197, BAB.

technology as the locus of communist modernization.²²⁴ Once again, the population took the backseat to larger considerations of international and economic importance. Moreover, the GDR made the decisive move to engage West Germany in the struggle for economic preeminence in the German Question and gave up its advantageous position as the Germany that, in a complete break with the past, built its material culture around socialist ideals.

Leading by Example: A Visual and Tactile Experience of *Wohnkultur*

Without a convincing social message behind material culture, the problem of how designers and design politicians could communicate national aesthetics to the population emerged. “Show and tell” became a popular method in the two German states to generate public acceptance of their respective modern domestic cultures. The Werkbund and the Zentralinstitut in cooperation with regional administration put together a range of activities that brought the message to the people. These endeavors targeted all ages to ensure the education of present and future consumers to buy the “right” products for the building of socialist and capitalist society.²²⁵

In 1954, the West Berlin Werkbund was the first to initiate taste education (*Geschmackserziehung*), a form of consumer education that relies on clear distinctions

²²⁴ The 1961 program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union equated scientific and technological progress with social progress, thus introducing the idea that machines not only contributed to the efficiency of everyday chores, but that “the regular use of new technology would also modernize its users, inculcating the scientific consciousness requisite for the transition to communism.” Susan E. Reid, “The Khrushchev Kitchen: Domesticating the Scientific-Technological Revolution,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 2 (2005): 313.

²²⁵ For detailed studies on the corrective systems of consumer education see David E. Crew, ed., *Consuming Germany in the Cold War* (Oxford: Berg, 2003); Ina Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis: Die Geschichte der Konsumkultur in der DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1999); Erica Carter, *How German is She? Postwar West German Reconstruction and the Consuming Woman* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

between good and bad design, in secondary schools of the divided city.²²⁶ To provide teachers with materials for demonstration, the Berliners invented so-called “Werkbund Boxes” (*Werkbundkisten*) that they filled with exemplary objects for the students to see, touch, and utilize in the classroom. The Werkbund arranged the objects in the boxes according to their material, function, utility, technology, shape, and color. Different thematic foci – “work space”, “kitchen appliances”, and “the set table” – engendered among the students a sense of utilitarian order and emotional context for the products in each box (see figure 5). Teachers could borrow the Werkbund Boxes free of charge and integrate them in the arts curriculum as they saw fit. In 1967, Lower Saxony was the last to join in with the states of Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg, which had been lending similar boxes to primary and secondary schools since 1956. Often, the boxes contained design of Werkbund members Heinrich Löffelhardt and Wilhelm Wagenfeld, and firms close to the association, such as Zwiesel glass, Arzberg china, and Carl Pott cutlery.²²⁷ Teachers received instruction manuals for discussing how the design corresponded to the function of the objects. Again, material culture’s potential for social reform was not an issue, but the assembled products represented for social norms. Some of the boxes, like the ones that focused on table settings, not only provided objects to look at, but also encouraged students to utilize them in simulations of family meals. In this way, the younger generation learned about the social traditions of objects while receiving an

²²⁶ See Stefan Jungklaus, “Werkbundkisten – Erziehung zum vernünftigen Konsumenten,” in *Kampf der Dinge. Der Deutsche Werkbund zwischen Anspruch und Alltag*, ed. Werkbundarchiv (Leipzig: Werkbundarchiv Museum der Dinge, 2008), 126-133; Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects*, 103-104.

²²⁷ Jungklaus, “Werkbundkisten – Erziehung zum vernünftigen Konsumenten,” 129.

aesthetic education, thus perpetuating conservative concepts of family and social relations.²²⁸

With the intellectual critique of functionalism, which in later years went by the moniker of “Good Design,” the *Werkbundkisten* initiative began to lose momentum in the early 1970s. One state after the other ended the program in the general climate of anti-authoritarianism and youth protest. At the same time the art education curriculum moved away from the fetishization of function as the guiding principle for instruction on form and “good taste.” A final report of the Werkbund in Lower Saxony stated that “Socio-political demands in school and the youth’s skepticism toward things that they perceive as representations of the establishment lead to a loss of their binding character or even to an urge to fight them - which make conventional art education impossible” when they ended their short-lived box program in 1970.²²⁹ As with Adorno’s critique of functionalism only a few years earlier, the Werkbund had to realize that their prescriptive vision of the relationship between people and their material environment had become outdated.

In the GDR students’ education in their relationship to the material environment took a completely different point of departure. After the secondary school reforms of 1958, the curriculum required poly-technical education and industrial apprenticeships.²³⁰ The underlying principles of this program had similar intentions as the *Bitterfelder Weg* by acquainting school students with the means of production in connection with the

²²⁸ The conservative nature of social policy in the Federal Republic of the 1950s has been acknowledged by scholarship. See for example Robert G. Moeller, ed., *West Germany under Construction: Politics, Society, and Culture in the Adenauer Era* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1997).

²²⁹ Final report, “Werkbundkisten,” ed. Deutscher Werkbund Niedersachsen-Bremen, 1970. WBK-I, ADO 9-316/70, WBA.

²³⁰ Rotraud Pohl (former designer at the Berlin Furniture Combine) in discussion with the author, 13 January 2009.

cultural value of objects.²³¹ It also aimed at introducing university-bound students to the everyday experiences of workers, familiarizing them with the social foundations of the German socialist state. In the West, professional internships became increasingly common in later decades, but here the goal lay in preparing young people for their vocations.

To target the adult population who possessed actual buying power, both the Werkbund and the Zentralinstitut started interior design counseling.²³² The so-called *Wohnberatungen* developed around the Federal Republic, starting in 1953 in Mannheim.²³³ By 1972, sixteen Werkbund-affiliated *Wohnberatungsstellen* received subsidies from the Ministry for Housing (*Ministerium für Wohnungswesen*) and municipalities across the republic.²³⁴ As such political support indicates, interior design counseling had an educational mission tied to welfare and social reform. However, the usual discrepancy between assertion and reality caught up with the Werkbund. Instead of explaining ways of creating a humane living environment with limited resources, the mission fell back on cultivating a West German domestic culture by impressing the functional aesthetic of Good Design on the population.²³⁵ Customers brought blueprints of their apartments to trained interior decorators who used model furniture, samples ranging from wallpaper to tea sets, and continuously updated product indexes to help

²³¹ Horst E. Wittig, *Pläne und Praktiken der polytechnischen Erziehung in Mitteldeutschland* (Bad Harzburg: Verlag für Wissenschaft, Wirtschaft und Technik, 1962). For a discussion of the connections between ideology and education see Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949-1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 80-81.

²³² Betts, *Authority of Everyday Objects*, 97-101.

²³³ Heinrich König, "Erste Wohnberatungsstelle in Mannheim," *Werk und Zeit*, 17/1953.

²³⁴ Hedwig Meermann, "Wohnberatung als politische Aufgabe," *Werk und Zeit*, 3/1972.

²³⁵ For a history of the Werkbund's involvement in creating German *Wohnkultur* see Nicola von Albrecht, "Klärung des Wohnwillens' oder die Wohnberatung," in *Kampf der Dinge. Der Deutsche Werkbund zwischen Anspruch und Alltag*, ed. Werkbundarchiv (Leipzig: Werkbundarchiv Museum der Dinge, 2008), 114-121.

them find space-saving solutions for their home. Some of the *Wohnberatungen* further offered exhibitions that displayed examples of Good Design or presented an idealized apartment setting. At the 1957 Interbau exhibit in Berlin, the Werkbund not only offered advice for the home in similar exhibitions, but also for leisure time consumption. This involvement in all areas of the material environment epitomizes the Werkbund's paternalistic claim through taste and consumer education to regulate the way in which the population led its life.²³⁶ As the dogmatism of functionalism came under increasing critique with the social protest around 1968, the Werkbund eventually joined the critique and changed the counseling in *Wohnberatungen* to consider the social context and to move away from "the taste of an elite of sensitive esthetes."²³⁷ Michael Andritzky, the Werkbund member most involved with *Wohnberatung*, finally demanded that interior design counseling should divorce itself from politics and economic interests.²³⁸

While the West German Werkbund tried to distance itself from the political order, the socialist order of the GDR practically produced *Wohnberatung*. With a change of the economic orientation from heavy industry toward consumer good production under Ulbricht's 1963 New Economic System of Planning and Steering (NES), furniture retail morphed from fulfilling the most basic needs of the population to a more service-oriented organization. For example, the *Wohnberatung* in Karl-Marx-Stadt, Ulbricht's idealized socialist industrial city both in regard to urban planning and architecture, joined the retail organization in the district in 1964.²³⁹ Just like their Western counterparts, interior designers advised customers with the help of samples, product catalogs, and mini-

²³⁶ Von Albrecht, " 'Klärung des Wohnwillens' oder die Wohnberatung," 120.

²³⁷ Michael Andritzky, "Die Zukunft der Wohnberatung," *Werk und Zeit*, 5/1971.

²³⁸ Michael Andritzky, "Neue Ziele und Methoden für Wohnberatungen," *Werk und Zeit* 1/1972.

²³⁹ Manfred Goerke, "Wohnberatung des Bezirkes Karl-Marx-Stadt," *Kultur im Heim*, 4/1964, 12-14.

exhibitions that promoted ideologically correct furniture and advertised new synthetic materials, such as Melafol. As part of the service, interior designers distributed information about where the customers could find specific designs, no small accomplishment in the state of chronic consumer product scarcity of the East German planned economy.²⁴⁰

The head of the Dresden interior design department Furniture Retail District Dresden, Hans Lindemann, exemplifies how *Wohnberatung* was interlinked with the economic system.²⁴¹ Aside from counseling consumers, Lindemann also published texts about good taste in socialism, traveled around the district and paid house visits, educated other interior designers and functioned as liaison to the council that decided over the product range rationalization. Within the constraints of the planned economy, the mission of the *Wohnberatung* was to create domestic environments that enabled and supported new experiences as well as ignite the population's *joie de vivre*.²⁴² These services were free unless the customer asked for the conception of an entire apartment. Nevertheless, the personal comfort of the home came second to the overall economic goals. *Wohnberatung* belonged to an entire institutionalized system that “ ‘trained’ consumers to ‘want’ what the government decided that they ‘needed.’ ”²⁴³ Since many customers moved into the new standardized, prefabricated high-rises that arose across East Germany, many of the new apartments had the identical blue-print. Thus, the problem of

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 12.

²⁴¹ Bernd Wurlitzer, “Vorbildlicher Kundendienst,” *Kultur im Heim*, 2/1972, 4-7.

²⁴² Ibid., 4.

²⁴³ Eli Rubin, *Synthetic Socialism Plastics and Dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 103.

moral degeneration linked to standardization that contributed to a loss in cultural value of GDR industrial design reemerged.

Despite, or even because of, the failure of design politicians and intellectuals to develop a terminology that could give East and West German domestic culture a profound socio-cultural meaning, the market for interior design publications boomed by the mid-1960s. This medium communicated trends, new ideas, and tastes through images, thus amending the discourse's silence with pictures that showed how one should live in modern postwar Germany. In a survey conducted in 1962 and 1963 in Cologne and its suburbs, sociologist Alphons Silbermann, found that among the design interested Cologne inhabitants with basic schooling, 39 percent read articles on furnishings and living spaces. Among those with a secondary education (*Gymnasium*), this number increased to 69 percent.²⁴⁴ Readers usually referred to special interior design magazines, the daily press or (lifestyle) magazines for information on interior design.²⁴⁵ Consequently, the media catered to a broad audiences ranging from experts to the generally interested.

Looking through the design press in postwar Germany, three types of design magazines emerge that differed in focus and target audience. The West German design magazine *Form* moved gradually toward a specialized and professional audience. When it first was conceptualized in 1957, it strongly connected to the Werkbund's general mission of educating the public about Good Design. Jupp Ernst and Wilhelm Wagenfeld served on the board of editors. Over the following years, renowned architects and

²⁴⁴ Alphons Silbermann, *Vom Wohnen der Deutschen: Eine soziologische Studie über das Wohnerlebnis* (Cologne: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1963), 213.

²⁴⁵ Silbermann, *Vom Wohnen der Deutschen*, 212.

designers such as Max Bill, Marcel Breuer, Walter Gropius, R. Buckminster Fuller, Misha Black, Fritz Eichler, Luigi Nervi, and Herbert Read assembled around the editors' table at the *Form* offices. Initially named *Internationale Revue – Form*, which signified a broader interest in shapes in the everyday around the globe, the editorial board changed the name to *Form – Zeitschrift für Gestaltung* in 1966, which indicates a target shift away from a general audience to professionals and the design-interested. Along with this specialized audience came increasingly specialized debates, such as the critique of functionalism in the late 1960s. Before, these debates had taken place exclusively in the Werkbund newspaper *Werk und Zeit*, shielded from the actual people who were the subject of these discourses. Rather than offering concrete advice as how to furnish German homes, the journal depicted images of new design trends and artistic developments that mostly remained highly abstract. In this regard, *Form* took on a hybrid form of half specialist, half generalist medium that was available at newsstands across the country and even on the other side of the border. There, GDR design professionals also read *Form* to stay informed about the developments in the West.²⁴⁶

Prior to the first issue of *Form*, the Institut für angewandte Kunst (later renamed Zentralinstitut and Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung) published the first volume of its specialized industrial design journal *Form und Zweck* (Form and Function) in 1956. The publication became a forum for institute employees and design professionals to show the connection between politics, ideology, and industrial design.²⁴⁷ While designers

²⁴⁶ Until the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961, West German magazines and scholarly periodicals were easily accessible. East German design schools even held subscriptions for their libraries.

²⁴⁷ See for example Dr. Walter Besenbruch, "Die Künstler und die Partei," *Form und Zweck*, 1957/58, I-VIII; Hans W. Aust, "Bessere Industrieform – eine wichtige Aufgabe bei Aufbau des Sozialismus," *Form und Zweck*, 1958/59, 25-35.

presented and described the scientific data for their designs, *Form und Zweck* did not provide advice on how Germans should furnish their homes. The debates remained largely scientific and ideological, without any application to the real living conditions of the masses.

Interior design magazines, on the other hand, developed a broader, popular appeal. In 1957, *Kultur im Heim* (Culture at Home) showed the early concern of socialism for the domestic environment and its affect on the New Man. The editors put great emphasis on images for presenting new designs. The pictures usually provided the context of arranged living situations, though most of them stemmed from company or fair displays. The logic behind orchestrated displays aimed at achieving emotional reactions. Horst Michel explained the merits of using a holistic approach to interior design with complete displays: “A vase does not hover in a vacuum. It stands on a piece of furniture, perhaps on a patterned table cloth, next to another object in front of a colored wall with pictures, and there are flowers in the vase [...] Only in accord with other things does an emotional impact arise.”²⁴⁸ Such settings demonstrated a cohesive socialist domestic culture in contexts that the population could easily apply to their homes, where furnishings created a sense of repose, comfort, and, in the years of Honecker’s party rule, privacy.²⁴⁹

The most successful West German interior design magazine *Schöner Wohnen* (Better Living) utilized similarly idealized settings. The magazine has influenced West German tastes from 1960 until today. After a successful first issue in 1960, its readership

²⁴⁸ Horst Michel, “Industrieformgestalter auf dem Bitterfelder Weg,” n.d., pg. 5, SiG.

²⁴⁹ For a discussion of privacy in the GDR see Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 119-147.

quickly grew to two million.²⁵⁰ Filled with pictures of the newest trends in furniture design, color palettes, and room arrangements, *Schöner Wohnen* brought interior design to the masses in an effort to promote aesthetically cohesive German living environments (see figure 6). Studio photographs populated the pages of the magazine, an art form in and of itself as the founding-editor-in-chief Josef Kremerkothen noted: “Small rooms could not look cramped, improvisation could not seem primitive – they had to appear lively [...], light had to create atmosphere [...], colours had to be finely matched with materials.”²⁵¹ Interior designer Peter Maly, fresh out of school in Detmold, joined the magazine in its start-up phase and developed into one of the most talented studio designers. As the furniture industry was still recovering from the war, some prized pieces remained unavailable to complete the “look” of a room. Maly, therefore, began designing the missing furniture himself, which led to a number of collaborations with high-end furniture producers, launching his career as an internationally successful furniture designer.

The practice of arranging settings created an entire generation of interior designers in the FRG who knew how to find the best light, up-to-date color combinations and leading designs. These new designers, however, did not take into consideration their actual human utility.²⁵² After Rolf Heide finished his architecture studies in Hamburg, he started working for Germany’s most successful women’s magazine *Brigitte* in 1959. He oversaw a magazine section dedicated to giving practical advice in response to reader

²⁵⁰ With a distribution of more than 3 million readers in 2011, it has grown into one of the biggest European lifestyle magazines. AWA 2011. <http://www.gujmedia.de/print/portfolio/schoener-wohnen/profil/> accessed on 2/18/2012.

²⁵¹ Kremerkothen, “Wegstücke,” 25.

²⁵² Kremerkothen, “Wohnen wie noch nie,” 14.

questions. However, his designs incorporated real world problems, such as how to combine antique with new furniture or cheap furniture with designer collector's items (see figures 7 and 8). This column's success inspired the publishing house Gruner and Jahr to publish *Schöner Wohnen*, the first magazine to exclusively focus on the domestic environment, which Heide joined in 1970.²⁵³ Henceforth, he also created idealized room arrangement and exerted tremendous influence in the shaping of population's interior design taste.

In the GDR, the utilization of studio pictures took a completely different direction. By the late 1970s, *Kultur im Heim*, the East German counterpart to *Schöner Wohnen*, abandoned ideal room arrangements in exchange for actual apartments. This development has been associated with the loosening of the Party's hold on every facet of public and private life.²⁵⁴ On closer examination of the magazine itself, it becomes evident that this change in imagery developed alongside the stagnation of GDR furniture design. In order to create a smokescreen of consumer choices and options, the editors often resorted to showing the same furniture in the same standardized pre-fabricated apartments, but in the context of different subcultures and lifestyles, hoping readers might not notice. As the East German state overextended itself with Erich Honecker's the consumer promises of the 1972 Unity of Economic and Social Policy, the publication changed focus from showing the population the unavailable possibilities of socialist production to the make-do ideas of their neighbors. In this way, the publication avoided

²⁵³ Kremerskothen, "Wohnen wie noch nie," 16. Kremerskothen was the founding editor-in-chief of *Schöner Wohnen*.

²⁵⁴ Betts, *Within Walls*, 141.

causing the kind of public disgruntlement that the earlier interior design exhibitions had created.

Conclusion

By exploring the avenues of communication between theoreticians, practitioners, and consumers of design, this study captures debates surrounding the social significance of design in general, and domestic culture in particular. The demise of functionalism as an aesthetic truth affected the two German states in different but related ways. As functionalism fell from grace in the Federal Republic in the late 1960s, it had just found a platform in the GDR. Not surprisingly, initiatives to bring this national aesthetics to the masses flourished during this period. By visualizing the emotional context of furniture in arranged displays and on blueprints of family homes at *Wohnberatungen*, the Werkbund and the Zentralinstitut brought their vision to the people. Students in East and West experienced material culture in art and poly-technical instruction. Here, they received lessons not only about aesthetics but also about the social relations in their respective part of Germany.

Design publications, exhibitions, and interior design magazines played an important part in official style diffusion throughout the two German societies. In the early 1950s, alongside the establishment of design institutions, a flurry of publication activities commenced in both Germanys. At first, print materials about new aesthetics became available through design exhibitions. Such communication channels then solidified through a robust magazine culture in East and West supported by practitioners of industrial and interior design, as well as those interested in home-decor. Moreover, these

readers used journals and magazines to learn about design innovations in the respective “other” Germany. Lost for words, the press and professional design journals created idealized studio photographs to promote the appearance of the new national culture. Designers, politicians, and retailers hoped that consumers would internalize these images and make their consumer choices in support of the aspired national aesthetic.

But the discursive developments in the GDR are not as much a result of a lacking social reform idea as in the West. Socialism inherently pushed for a revolution of the social and cultural fabric. While this debate began with the cultural concerns surrounding Socialist Realism, namely integration in the Eastern Bloc and demarcation from West Germany, it received a new quality when the principles of production became the leading influence in policy-making. Following Michel’s aesthetic interventions allows insights into the changing meaning and function of socialist material culture, as Michel condemned the same kitsch products that the government promoted as the epitome of GDR national culture. With an aesthetic of moderation, Michel continuously contested East German state socialism’s material and political ambitions, while pursuing a consciously socialist production.

Whereas Michel was a proponent of centralized industrial organization, he promoted only small and medium scale production to keep social responsibility a part of manufacturing. With the standardization of product ranges, he hoped to have more control over what was produced as well as distributed to the East German home.²⁵⁵ This attitude did not foreclose diverse styles, as long as they moderately interpreted a taste or fashion. Michel did not believe in coercion and taste dictation. He rather strove to

²⁵⁵ Großmann, Arbeitsgruppe Sitzmöbel beim Institut für Innengestaltung Weimar, Bericht über die Beratung am 24.2.1959, 14 March 1959, DE1/26539, BAB.

enlighten retail buyers and consumers to positively influence production with the right demand. Michel helped establish a modern vision during the reconstruction years and the *Bitterfelder Weg* in the late 1950s and early 1960s, he was unable to leave a mark on the Formalism Debate and the later years of modish production. In these phases, which of course overlapped not coincidentally with heightened Cold War tension and deteriorating German-German relations in the early 1950s and 1960s, moderation contradicted GDR ambitions. A distinct national culture and mass production presented two ways in which East Germany aimed to earn a higher profile in the postwar world.

CHAPTER 3: PRODUCING MODERN GERMAN HOMES: THE ECONOMY OF NATIONAL BRANDING

Introduction

The goal of turning the discourse on official aesthetics into practice set both German states on a track that business historians have called “national branding.”²⁵⁶ This term describes the efforts of a network of designers and producers to create a narrative of political significance around their products. The urge to give greater meaning to their works fits well within the political climate of the Cold War period, when an important component of German-German relations emphasized competing ways of living. Designers and producers created a narrative that took “home furnishings and associate[d] them with established cultural categories and principles, moving meaning from the culturally constituted world to the consumer good.”²⁵⁷ Like a product brand, divergent ways of living not only offered both German populations a sense of belonging, but also promoted their cultural achievements abroad.²⁵⁸ A coherent aesthetic, however, hinged upon strategic cooperation and communication between the political leadership, designers, industrialists, and consumers in East and West – an endeavor that, over time, proved quite difficult to accomplish. In the end, rivaling ideas about German modern *Wohnkultur* undermined the necessary narrative coherence for the promotion of East or West German “corporate identity” at home and abroad, which left the two German states

²⁵⁶ For an example of national branding in the furniture industry see Per Hansen, “Co-branding Product and Nation: Danish Modern Furniture and Denmark in the United States, 1940-1970,” in *Trademarks, Brands, and Competitiveness*, ed. Teresa de Silva Lopes and Paul Duguid (New York: Routledge, 2010), 77-101.

²⁵⁷ Grant McCracken, “Culture and Consumption: A Theoretical Account of the Structure and Movement of the Cultural Meaning of Consumer Goods,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 13, no. 1 (1986): 76.

²⁵⁸ Michael E. Porter, “The Competitive Advantage of Nations,” *Harvard Business Review* (March-April 1990): 73-93.

vulnerable to external influences and set the stage in the late 1960s for their unintended aesthetic convergence.²⁵⁹

Taking into consideration the fundamental structural differences between the economic and political systems of the FRG and GDR, this chapter compares how policymakers interacted with the industrial sector and consumers to link ideologically conforming ways of living to economic reconstruction and prosperity. The problem under consideration here is one of political rhetoric versus economic reality: why, after decades of cultural delineation, did both states fail to assert an official style, a “national aesthetic” in German workshops and homes? This chapter is especially interested in exploring economic and political mechanisms in East and West Germany that impaired the consistent implementation of official aesthetics in everyday life. First, it looks at the economic-cultural structures established in East and West to put their respective aesthetic goals into practice. In a second step, it examines the practical limits of official aesthetic influence on industrial production and consumption. In the process, both Germanies moved away from rigid functionalism and Socialist Realism respectively to a shared idea of economical production and living comfort.

Economic Prosperity and Political Legitimacy

Competition for popular support tied the creation of a coherent national narrative of postwar German aesthetics directly to economic prosperity, an important sphere of German-German relations. Material wellbeing and its cultural denominators became

²⁵⁹ Drawing on Roland Barthes’ concept of the “fashion system,” Per Hansen points to the importance of coherent narratives in the successful transformation of a product into a national brand. Per Hansen, “Networks, Narratives, and Markets: The Rise and Decline of Danish Modern Furniture, 1930-1970,” *Business History Review* 80, no. 3 (2006).

proxies for economic preeminence. Following the example of Richard Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev's famous Kitchen Debate at the American National Exhibition in Moscow in July 1959, the German Democratic Republic entered into competition over standards of living with the Federal Republic of Germany.²⁶⁰ At the height of the Berlin Crisis in 1959, an "Open Letter to Furniture Workmen in the German Democratic Republic" explained the workers' role in the German Cold War for hearts and minds:

In this situation, West Germans look to us. They observe how we live. Our successes in the social and cultural arena are great and lack an equivalent in the Bonn Republic. We have made progress in the field of material consumption as well. And it is in material consumption where we must advance faster to overtake West Germany.²⁶¹

At the time, the well-oiled GDR propaganda machine most likely distributed letters such as this above to all major industries. For workers in the furniture industry, though, the connection between the socialist way of life, expressed in *Wohnkultur*, and the fruits of their labor was especially evident. The idea behind accelerating the development and production of a distinctly socialist furniture culture aimed at counteracting images of abundance coming from West Germany.²⁶² Officials of the GDR projected confidence in their ideological superiority vis-à-vis the West mainly through the display of cultural and social achievements, such as the integration of the female workforce in the production process.²⁶³ At the same time, politicians could not deny that an impediment to East

²⁶⁰ See Susan E. Reid, "Who Will Best Whom? Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9, no. 4 (2008): 855-904.

²⁶¹ GDR Planning Commission, "Offener Brief an alle Möbelwerker der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik," c. 1959, DE1/26547, BAB.

²⁶² The influence of Western consumer culture on the East German population has been well documented in the works of Ina Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis*; Judd Stitzel, *Fashioning Socialism: Clothing, Politics, and Consumer Culture in East Germany* (Oxford: Berg, 2005); and David E. Crew, ed., *Consuming Germany in the Cold War* (Oxford: Berg, 2003).

²⁶³ Policy-making in the East had an effect on the FRG. Henry Ashby Turner argues that the development of social policy in West Germany in the 1950s was partly influenced by an awareness among West German

German hegemony in the divided country manifested itself in their backward economy – the Achilles’ heel of state socialism. While the letter identifies slow growth as the cause for the underperformance of industry, it remains silent about any practical cure. Rather, economic planners assumed that economic problems could be overcome using willpower alone – an attitude characteristic of socialist command economies.²⁶⁴ With this letter, the East German state eventually aligned its economic and political agendas by asking workers to increase productivity as an expression of progress, and to reach a leadership position rather than simply membership among industrialized nations.

Part and parcel of this plan was the economic overtake of West Germany, yet its “economic miracle” gave the Federal Republic a competitive advantage over the GDR. While literature on the Federal Republic of Germany approaches the West’s foundation in various ways, historians agree that the prosperity of the social market economy (*soziale Marktwirtschaft*) generated support among the population.²⁶⁵ Such popular support contributed to West Germany’s political legitimacy at home and abroad. Since many had lived through the stock market crash of 1929 and the resulting global financial

politicians of standards of welfare provision in the GDR. Henry Ashby Tuner Jr., *The Two Germanies Since 1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

²⁶⁴ National Socialist economic planning functioned on similar principles. See Dirk van Laak, “Zwischen ‘organisch’ und ‘organisatorisch’: ‘Planung’ als politische Leitkategorie zwischen Weimar und Bonn,” Burkhard Dietz/Helmut Gabel/Ulrich Tiedau, eds., *Griff nach dem Westen. Die “Westforschung” der völkisch-nationalen Wissenschaften zum nordwesteuropäischen Raum, 1919-1960*, vol. 1 (Münster: Waxmann, 2003): 67-90.

²⁶⁵ For literature on the Federal Republic’s state-building and the social market economy see Mark E Spicka, *Selling the Economic Miracle: Economic Reconstruction and Politics in West Germany, 1949-1957* (New York: Berghahn, 2007), 3-5; Edgar Wolfrum, *Die geglückte Demokratie: Geschichte der Bundesrepublik von ihren Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2006), 75-77; Konrad Jarausch, *Die Umkehr: Deutsche Wandlungen 1945-1995* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2004), 117; Heinrich August Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen II: Deutsche Geschichte 1933-1990* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2005), 160-161; Axel Schildt, *Ankunft im Westen: Ein Essay zur Erfolgsgeschichte der Bundesrepublik* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer 1999), 49-86; and Erica Carter, *How German is She? Postwar West German Reconstruction and the Consuming Woman* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 5.

crisis, which had shaped popular memories of the Weimar Republic and informed suspicions about democratic rule in the postwar period, economic progress and the acceptance of a new democratic state went, for a cautious population, hand in hand.²⁶⁶ Therefore, the unprecedented social improvement of the 1950s generated a positive attitude toward the new democracy. West Germans eventually “identified with the economic benefits of the Federal Republic of Germany rather than with any political institutions or traditions.”²⁶⁷ As Mark E. Spicka’s examination of Christian Democrats’ election campaigns in the 1950s reveals, the Adenauer government understood popular sentiment and used it to form consensus by forging national identities deliberately around economic policies and the social market economy. With a political culture in place that evolved around a prosperous and successful economy, the West posed a great challenge to the relatively economically weak GDR.

The partition of Germany facilitated the western economic miracle. Because of its diversified national economy, geographical factors as well as structural development favored the Federal Republic. Traditionally agricultural areas in the east were cut off from industry in the west, especially in the Ruhr region, southern parts of Lower Saxony, the Rhine-Main region with continuation to the Rhine-Neckar Region and the region surrounding Stuttgart in the south. Furthermore, the Rhine river system enabled the transportation of consumer and bulk goods towards the northern ports. Meanwhile, because of its location at the edge of the Eastern bloc, the GDR lost its former importance

²⁶⁶ See Lutz Niethammer’s analysis of interviews with workers in the Ruhr region. Lutz Niethammer, “Normalization in the West: Traces of Memory Leading back into the 1950s,” in *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949-1968*, ed. Hanna Schissler (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 239.

²⁶⁷ Spicka, *Selling the Economic Miracle*, 3.

in the east-west traffic. The FRG held most of the coal and ore resources, while the resource-rich areas in the east had been surrendered to Poland. West Germany also had a larger percentage of climatically favored and consumer-oriented agricultural areas, and ice-free ports.²⁶⁸ Moreover, the partition prevented the West from having to support the agrarian East. These favorable conditions, coupled with a modified free-market economy, left the West well-positioned to quickly increase production to satisfy consumer demand and to regain foreign markets, beginning with the Korean War in 1950, which led to an industrial boom that lasted well into the 1960s.²⁶⁹

Years into the reconstruction period, the GDR continued to suffer additional disadvantage because it shouldered the larger portion of Soviet war reparation claims after 1945.²⁷⁰ Economic planners countered this weakness in the 1958 collectivization of industry into “People-Owned Businesses” (*Volkseigene Betriebe*, VEB) to improve Plan coordination and increase individual output. One after the other, most every industry joined the coordination effort to eradicate overlapping production and waste of resources. Subsequently, the superficial restructuring of regional clusters of furniture industry was successful in densely industrial areas such as Zeulenroda, Dresden, Themar, Neugersdorf,

²⁶⁸ Karlheinz Hottes, “Regional Variations of the Economic Development in the Federal Republic of Germany,” in *American German International Seminar. Geography and Regional Policy: Resource Management by Complex Political Systems*, ed. John S. Adams, Werner Fricke and Wolfgang Herden (Heidelberg: Geographische Institut Universität Heidelberg, 1983), 41.

²⁶⁹ A.J. Nicholls, *Freedom with Responsibility: The Social Market Economy in Germany, 1918-1963* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1994); Gerold Ambrosius, *Die Durchsetzung der sozialen Marktwirtschaft in Westdeutschland, 1945-1949* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1977); James C. Van Hook, *Rebuilding Germany: The Creation of the Social Market Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Christoph Buchheim, *Die Wiedereingliederung Westdeutschlands in die Weltwirtschaft, 1945-1958* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1990).

²⁷⁰ After negotiations between the Allies failed in 1945 and 1946, the Soviet Union decided to extract a minimum of 10 billion dollars worth of machinery and products from the Eastern zone of occupation. Until 1949, entire factories were relocated to Soviet territory. Norman Naimark estimates that the occupiers took about a third of all industrial structures. Norman Naimark, *Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 169.

and Oelsa-Rabenau.²⁷¹ However, where industry was thinly spread out, these attempts at concentration and specialization did not take hold until the second wave of collectivization in the 1970s.²⁷²

Inferior conditions alone cannot explain the increasing gap between East and West German economic performance during the Cold War. Economic historians have offered different explanations for the failure of the GDR economy. Jaap Sleifer blames the slow improvement of low labor productivity, whereas André Steiner finds the Plan to have been the cause for bad economic results in the GDR.²⁷³ Steiner's findings suggest that the Plan set "soft" goals because economic policymakers were never fully knowledgeable about the real potential of material and human resources, which, he argues, could have yielded much higher returns.²⁷⁴ As I will show, imperfect linkages between the production and consumption systems represent another area of underperformance, which not only negatively influenced technological development, but also sabotaged the East German national brand narrative and undermined the population's identification with the state. Because of the inefficiencies in the GDR economy, East Germans voted with their feet, steadily migrating westward in search of better economic and more liberal political conditions. In April 1961 alone 30,000 GDR citizens fled to the West. This exodus marked an enormous brain drain, since the average

²⁷¹ Zeulenroda was already turned into a VEB in 1956. Five-Year Plan, *Wissenschaftlich-technischer Fortschritt der VEB Ostthüringer Möbelwerke Zeulenroda*, 16 April 1956, DE1/26517, BAB.

²⁷² Concept, "Zur Entwicklung der Möbelindustrie der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik Berlin," September 1964. DE 1/ VS II 12173, BAB, 3.

²⁷³ Jaap Sleifer, *Planning Ahead and Falling Behind: The East German Economy in Comparison with West Germany, 1936-2002*, Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte Beiheft 8 (Berlin: Akademie, 2006), 157-161.

²⁷⁴ André Steiner, *Von Plan zu Plan: Eine Wirtschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (Munich: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2004), 7 and 13.

GDR refugee was young, educated, and highly adaptable.²⁷⁵ The general loss of GDR competence interrupted the country's technological and scientific development, deeply undermining its industrial progress. The construction of the Berlin Wall on August 13, 1961, however, abruptly halted this refugee flow.

While many were willing to risk their lives trying to cross the newly fortified German-German border in later years, the number of successful escapes remained extremely small.

The Berlin Wall stood witness to the economic dissatisfaction and political disagreement that weakened the GDR's legitimacy domestically and internationally to such a degree that the Party felt forced to take extreme measure in order to prevent people from leaving. Equipping the Iron Curtain with barbed wire and automated machine guns, the Soviet Union, at Ulbricht's request, cemented the status quo of a divided Europe with a divided Germany at its center.²⁷⁶ Chances for German unification became even more remote, though neither side stopped paying lip service to the general idea. Rather, the fortified border further severed economic ties between the GDR and the FRG, not to mention family relations, thus further integrating East Germany into the COMECON. The years 1958-1961, then, not only marked a turning point for the already difficult intra-German relations from the Berlin Crisis to the construction of the Wall, but also set the stage for an open confrontation over superior industrial prowess.

²⁷⁵ Wolfrum, *Die geglückte Demokratie*, 146 and 196.

²⁷⁶ For a discussion of Soviet and East German goals behind the building of the Wall see Hope M. Harrison. *Driving the Soviets Up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953-1961* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

Centralism vs. Regionalism in the Struggle for Aesthetic Coherence

Curiously, the German-German competition for superiority in industrial design and material culture had first and foremost domestic implications. While the actual rival was on the other side of the zone border, at times opposing goals of the central government and the regional administrations caused internal struggles in design and production. In most cases, centralism and regionalism ought to strike one as forward concepts of political and social organization, involving the assignment of specific responsibilities to different levels of governance. In the German case, however, regional and federal powers have always been muddled, leading back to the contested conceptions of authority enshrined in the German Confederation (1815-1866).²⁷⁷ In terms of postwar national branding, these opposing forces undermined the creation of a cohesive identity narrative.

A considerable body of scholarly literature has examined the effects of German cultural regionalism on questions of identity. For example, the idea of *Heimat* (homeland) is often contrasted with the nineteenth-century struggle for a German national state.²⁷⁸ Meanwhile, the significance of regional and centralized administrative structures in politics and the economy for cultural concepts has remained largely unexplored,

²⁷⁷ For an example of contested powers see Enno E. Kraehe, "Practical Politics in the German Confederation: Bismarck and the Commercial Code," *Journal of Modern History* 25, no. 1 (1953): 13-24.

²⁷⁸ Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Peter Heil, *"Gemeinden sind wichtiger als Staaten": Idee und Wirklichkeit des kommunalen Neuanfangs in Rheinland-Pfalz 1945-1957*. Veröffentlichung der Kommission des Landtages für die Geschichte des Landes Rheinland-Pfalz, no. 21 (Mainz: v. Hase&Koehler, for the Kommission des Landtages, 1997); Katharina Wiegand, ed., *Heimat: Konstanten und Wandel im 19./20. Jahrhundert: Vorstellungen und Wirklichkeiten* (Munich: Deutscher Alpenverein, 1997); Benjamin Ziemann, *Front und Heimat: Ländliche Kriegserfahrungen im südlichen Bayern 1914-1923*. Veröffentlichungen des Instituts zur Erforschung der europäischen Arbeiterbewegung, Schriftenreihe A: Darstellungen, no. 8 (Essen: Klartext, 1997); James Retallack, "'Why Can't a Saxon be more like a Prussian?' Regional Identities and the Birth of Modern Political Culture in Germany, 1866-67," *Canadian Journal of History* 32 (1997): 26-55.

especially in the postwar period. One possible reason for this neglect may be scholars' *a priori* conception of the Federal Republic as a decentralized, federal state that was deeply anchored in its federal constitutional structure, with the GDR perceived conversely as a controlling, centralized state that modeled its totalitarian aspirations after the Soviet Union.²⁷⁹ By looking at the intertwined history of the post-German states, however, the paradigms of centralism and regionalism bring to the fore conflicting trends in political culture that undermine simplistic characterization of either Germany.

To clarify the usage of terms in the context of industrial design, I have developed two archetypical definitions, whose terminology can be applied to both the federally and the centrally organized German states. Regionalism in industrial design I understand to be activism originating with regional cultural institutions and economic structures that shape design principles in order to economically and politically assist the region, thereby favoring a regional aesthetic identity over a coherent national style. Design centralism, then, is the attempt to create central structures that define and execute cultural and economic policies for the entire nation, thereby suppressing regional activism and aesthetic diversity.

Dualism between center and region in post-1945 West Germany generally worked to assign differing sets of powers to either level, but at times these overlapped. In cases of overlapping powers or abrogation, however, the more powerful center won out over

²⁷⁹ A noteworthy exception to this trend is Jan Palmowski's analysis of "*sozialistische Heimat*" in Jan Palmowski, *Inventing a Socialist Nation: Heimat and the Politics of Everyday Life in the GDR, 1945-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

regional objectives.²⁸⁰ For example, cultural policy was an especially contested field during the Cold War years. While cultural policymaking powers lay with the region, its reverberations were felt in the areas of diplomacy and national economy, two political areas directed by the federal government. In the GDR, political centralization only slowly percolated down to economic structures and, apart from mass organizations, even less to the realm of everyday culture.²⁸¹ As the history of these tensions between region and center well predated the German partition of 1945, a strong culture of regionalism was present in both Germanys when they reached statehood. The following discussion of East and West German design policy traces the lines between central and regional powers in the realms of culture and economics, which were blurred at best, or even completely sidestepped at times.

From the beginning, West German industrial reconstruction led to the creation of novel local organizations. They were the result of changed regional conditions, the refugee problem, and the reorganization of transportation routes caused by the German partition. In contrast to the centralized economy of the Third Reich, these new organizations remained anchored at the regional and municipal level, where they became “essential control elements.”²⁸² In the scarcity of the postwar years, regional development took precedence over national planning, and a competition for investments and national subsidies ensued. The foundation of the West German design council Rat für Formgebung, a national institution dedicated to supervise industrial development in the

²⁸⁰ Arthur B. Gunlicks, “The German Federal System Today: National, State, and Local Relations in an Era of Cooperative Federalism,” in Louis A. Picard and Raphael Zariski (eds.), *Subnational Politics in the 1980s: Organization, Reorganization and Economic Development* (New York: Praeger, 1987), 89-102.

²⁸¹ For an analysis of the role of mass organizations in the GDR see Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949-1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 21-86.

²⁸² Hottes, “Regional Variations of the Economic Development in the Federal Republic of Germany,” 42.

field of design and marketing, stood in stark contrast to these regional tendencies. The fact that its foundation articulated the seemingly contradictory notion of cultural centralism in a federal liberal state was also not lost on contemporaries. “It may seem surprising that government-controlled agencies should act as arbiters of taste in industrial design and assume a frankly partisan or even doctrinaire attitude in promoting modern design,” observed art historian Lorenz Eitner, a 1957 Humboldt fellow in West Germany. “This is possible in Germany (where the State has often played an active role in such matters) because since 1945 the weight of official approval has come to rest on the side of modern art, modern architecture, and modern design.”²⁸³ The Rat für Formgebung thus claimed to represent a social and political consensus on modern design. However, because the West German economy was not centralized, informal agreement with industry about which aesthetics could best visualize the spirit of a postwar Germany was crucial to the Rat für Formgebung’s success.

Fortunately for the design council, organized industrial interests, embodied by the Federation of German Industries (*Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie*, BDI), shared with it an aesthetic inherited from Weimar modernism. The BDI became a trusted ally in the conservative government’s economic policies of the early 1950s.²⁸⁴ By 1950, a lack of capital, multiple allied production restrictions and decreased domestic demand worked against the structure of the liberal economy. These conditions caused the unemployment of more than two million workers. Conjuring up images of Weimar, depression, and the danger of political radicalization, the Adenauer government came under fire from the

²⁸³ Lorenz Eitner, “Industrial Design in Postwar Germany,” *Design Quarterly* 40 (1957): 13.

²⁸⁴ Werner Abelshauser, “Ansätze ‘Korporativer Marktwirtschaft’ in der Koreakrise der frühen fünfziger Jahre: Ein Briefwechsel zwischen dem Hohen Kommissar John McCloy und Bundeskanzler Konrad Adenauer,” *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 30, no. 4 (1982): 715-756.

political opposition. When the *Marktwirtschaft* experiment threatened to fail, the West German government felt American pressure to institute some degree of state regulation. Adenauer turned to industrial associations to avoid reversing the principles of the postwar economy. Consequently, the BDI took on the task of distributing scarce resources and organizing exports, demonstrating their indispensability in the young republic.²⁸⁵ Corporate traditions thus found their way back into the liberal economy of the Federal Republic, which, as Wolfrum puts it, raised the question of whether the republic would be able to withstand strong economic corporatism in the long run.²⁸⁶ In regard to its history of industrial design, this question certainly needs to be answered with a clear no.

The role that industry played in West Germany's cultural revival cannot be overemphasized. Beginning with the foundation of a philanthropic committee, the Culture Council (*Kulturkreis*) in 1951, the BDI awarded fellowships and organized art shows to support the arts in Germany.²⁸⁷ The BDI lawyer and art enthusiast Gustav Stein largely initiated this cultural engagement. As the executive manager of the BDI and the Kulturkreis he published a booklet in 1952, which invoked the historical responsibility of entrepreneurs as patrons of the arts. For example, big-business names, such as Thyssen, Krupp, and Reemtsma, re-introduced the concept of the collector-benefactor.²⁸⁸ Yet the motivation behind this kind of cultural philanthropy was not entirely altruistic. Patronage

²⁸⁵ Wolfrum, *Die geglickte Demokratie*, 79.

²⁸⁶ Corporatism is defined as the instrumentalization of large organizations toward administrative activity that has traditionally fallen to the state. For a detailed discussion of lobbyism, associations, and corporatism in Germany and an overview of scholarly works see Peter Lösche, *Verbände und Lobbyismus in Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007) and Eberhard Schütt-Wetschky, *Interessenverbände und Staat* (Darmstadt: Primus, 1997) and Gerhard Lehmsbruch, "Wandlungen der Interessenpolitik im liberalen Korporatismus," in Ulrich von Alemann and Rolf G. Heinze (eds.), *Verbände und Staat* (Opladen: Westdeutscher, 1979), 51.

²⁸⁷ Statutes, Kulturkreises im Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie e.V., 1952, Preamble.

²⁸⁸ Gustav Stein, *Unternehmer als Förderer der Kunst* (Frankfurt a. M.: August Lutzeyer, 1952), 2.

helped the industry to polish its image, which years of collaboration with the Nazi regime had badly damaged.²⁸⁹ Stein himself believed that art was a socio-political force that connected people. The diffusion of everyday life with cultural objects, in his opinion, could prevent the disintegration of society – a process that he had witnessed in the Weimar Republic.²⁹⁰ While the Kulturkreis members' taste in art was as diverse as its membership, Werner Bührer has found that the BDI followed official aesthetics in its award practices and, in this way, became Germany's biggest patron of abstract modern art. This inclination toward modernist taste carried over into the BDI's work with industrial designers, who were eventually included in the award structure of the Kulturkreis in 1957.²⁹¹

In the early years of its existence, the Rat für Formgebung held a mediator position between business and large-scale consumers. Serving as a source of information for government institutions in particular that were in dire need of office furniture, mess kits and flatware for cafeterias, and art to put into the new administrative buildings in West Germany's new capital Bonn, the Rat connected producers and large customers.²⁹² Gatekeeper to prestigious projects such as furnishing German embassies abroad or displaying products at numerous international exhibitions, the Rat possessed considerable

²⁸⁹ Werner Bührer, "Der Kulturkreis im Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie und die 'kulturelle Modernisierung' der Bundesrepublik in den 50er Jahren," in *Modernisierung im Wiederaufbau: Die westdeutsche Gesellschaft der 50er Jahre*, ed. Axel Schildt and Arnold Sywottek (Bonn: Dietz, 1993), 584; S. Jonathan Wiesen, *West German Industry and the Challenge of the Nazi Past, 1945-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 165-170.

²⁹⁰ *Gustav Stein: Sammler – Förderer – Freund*, ed. Wilhelm-Lehmbruck-Museum Duisburg (Duisburg: Stadt Duisburg, 1983), 13.

²⁹¹ Gustav Stein, "Das sechste Arbeitsjahr," in *Jahrestagung Lübeck 57*, ed. Kulturkreis im Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie e.V., n.d., 24.

²⁹² Annual reports by the Rat für Formgebung provide a detailed description of the Rat's activities and consulting contracts. For example Mia Seeger, *Rat für Formgebung – Darmstadt – Bericht für das Jahr 1956/1957*, Darmstadt 8 April 1957, Bibliothek des Rat für Formgebung [hereafter referred to as BRfF].

power over industry between 1952 and 1965. The more or less voluntary cooperation between industry and economic policymakers under the leadership of Economic Minister Ebert strengthened the national brand at first, as the BDI and the Rat für Formgebung worked on the same modernist narrative. However, the foundation of a BDI group specifically dedicated in industrial design (*Arbeitskreis*) in 1952, organized to directly represent industrial interest in questions of design, eventually disrupted this peaceful cooperation between policymakers and big business. Like the design council, the Arbeitskreis set as its task the education of designers and the encouragement of rational and socially responsible industrial design.²⁹³ As previously illustrated, because of the similarity of their mission, the Arbeitskreis was very involved in the activities of the Rat für Formgebung and had attained a leading role by the mid-1960s when Ernst Schneider's dual presidency of both associations began to infringe on the independence of the design council in a fashion that could be termed a hostile takeover. Thereafter, the mission of the design council became increasingly industry-oriented at the expense of its cultural mission.²⁹⁴

By the mid-sixties, the BDI Arbeitskreis's reconstitution as the Design Circle (*Gestaltkreis*) in 1965 signaled an emerging divergence of state and business interests.²⁹⁵ Entrepreneurial debate pinned this difference in perspectives on attitudes toward the utility of industrial design. The secretary general of the Study Group of Industry for Product Design and Product Planning in Stuttgart, Baden-Württemberg, implicitly

²⁹³ Stein, *Unternehmer als Förderer der Kunst*, 15-16.

²⁹⁴ See also Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects*, 251-252.

²⁹⁵ Terms such as a singular "business interest" and one "business community" are naturally complicated concepts that have no equivalent in reality. While I am using them as shorthand to identify mainstream attitudes and general tendencies among entrepreneurs, I remain conscious of diverse entrepreneurial opinions and management styles in industrial organizations.

commented on the emerging tension between the government's vision of product design and that of the business community: "Our study group came together to help members replace unclear will with methodological thinking. They don't want to speak any longer about the design-idea and its cultural-political goals, but want instead to search for practicable ways toward its realization."²⁹⁶ While in earlier years the visions of the Rat für Formgebung and the BDI had overlapped when industry interest supported the "entrepreneur as patron of the arts" concept, they diverged at this juncture, because of business's more profit-oriented interpretation of design as a selling point rather than a cultural message.²⁹⁷ In the everyday, West German design thus lost the initial simplicity and rigidity of postwar functionalism. Consequently, the official aesthetic survived in government-sponsored exhibitions, yet production gravitated towards catering to consumer tastes. Unfolding strife between the Werkbund and BDI factions on the board of the Rat für Formgebung between 1968 and 1969, coupled with a lack of decisive management after Mia Seeger's departure, furthermore added to the Rat's decline in economic significance for the business community.

Even more so, the business community's vision for German design as a national brand had a more pragmatic emphasis than that of the Werkbund-inspired Rat für Formgebung. During the Weimar years, Werkbund and Bauhaus designers had sought to create design solutions that would elevate the lower classes. Despite these lofty goals, however, their designs ultimately became collector's items that only the affluent could afford. Members actively involved in the BDI Arbeitskreis, on the contrary, often came

²⁹⁶ Geyer in interview with Johann Klöcker, "Industrial Design: Neue Aufgaben des Unternehmers," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 14 April 1965, 35-36.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

from middle-class enterprises and family companies.²⁹⁸ Because the scale of small- and medium-sized businesses allowed for the combination of traditional craftsmanship with serial production, *Mittelstand* entrepreneurs were more likely to consider questions of design and premium materials than were mass producers.²⁹⁹ In particular, the furniture industry upheld these standards because technologies of wood processing had not advanced enough to mechanize production entirely. In this light, the then-contemporary observation that “German design is for the middle class” pointed to both the production and the consumption-related aspects of West German industry.³⁰⁰

In their postwar development, *Mittelstand* industries differed decisively from big business, which scholars have discussed predominately as an example of West Germany’s economic Americanization.³⁰¹ While aspects of American marketing and management permeated big industry, smaller businesses, such as in the furniture industry, were less prone to Americanize their business methods.³⁰² Instead, German *Mittelstand*

²⁹⁸ Christopher Oesterreich, *Die “Gute Form” im Wiederaufbau*, 230-231.

²⁹⁹ While the term cannot be directly translated, Hartmut Berghoff defines the *Mittelstand* as “the ‘golden middle’, something that strikes a balance between grinding poverty and immoral riches.” Membership of the *Mittelstand* remains an attractive social concept until today, because it projects the notion of solid, but legitimate wealth. Hartmut Berghoff, “The End of Family Business? The *Mittelstand* and German Capitalism in Transition, 1949-2000,” *The Business History Review* 80, no. 2 (2006): 264.

³⁰⁰ See Lorenz Eitner, “Industrial Design in Postwar Germany,” 17.

³⁰¹ Anselm Doering-Manteuffel defines the concept of Americanization as “the dominance of US American cultural patterns in a different national-cultural (nationalkulturellen) context.” Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, *Wie westlich sind die Deutschen? Amerikanisierung und Westernisierung im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 15. See also Konrad Jarausch and Hannes Siegrist, ed. *Amerikanisierung und Sowjetisierung in Deutschland, 1945-1970* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1997). For discussions of economic Americanization see Paul Erker, “‘Amerikanisierung’ der westdeutschen Wirtschaft? Stand und Perspektiven der Forschung,” in *Amerikanisierung und Sowjetisierung in Deutschland 1945-1970*, ed. Jarausch and Siegrist, 137-145; Susanne Hilger, “‘Amerikanisierung’ deutscher Unternehmen. Wettbewerbsstrategien und Unternehmenspolitik bei Henkel, Siemens und Daimler-Benz, 1945/49-1975,” (Stuttgart: Steiner 2004); Harm G. Schröter, *Americanization of the European Economy: Comparative Survey of American Economic Influence in Europe since the 1880s* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005).

³⁰² For an in-depth discussion of the restructuring of West German industry after 1945 and its integration into the world market see Volker Berghahn, *The Americanisation of West German Industry 1945-1973* (Cambridge, UK: University of Cambridge Press, 1986). Edgar Wolfrum notes, though, that this slow

entrepreneurs shared their belief in durable materials and timeless shapes with other European countries that had developed socially conscious design movements in the first decades of the twentieth century, such as the Swiss Werkbund (1913) and the Dutch De Stijl (1917). By necessity as well as by intention, reconstruction design embodied German such values by combining the aesthetic with the utilitarian and social responsibility with economic accessibility. Concerned with satisfying urgent needs rather than speeding up consumption cycles, German industrialists in the early republic despised the American production practices that consciously cut short product lifespan with superficial styling and mediocre quality of materials and construction.³⁰³ This attitude persisted until well after reconstruction and was affirmed in 1965 when the BDI Arbeitskreis reconstituted itself as the Gestaltkreis. Gustav Stein summarized its renewed mission as follows: “If everybody took part in the conscious quality reduction coming out of America, then there is only one recipe for success for us: technological quality with its ‘Made-in-Germany’ seal shaped by ‘good design as a quality factor.’ ”³⁰⁴ Business elites thus envisioned their own narrative of a West German national brand that rested on quality production. Perceiving themselves as the guarantor of these quality standards with a commitment to value, in their mind, German aesthetics and production ethics stood in opposition to American ones.

process was diversified and that especially the *Mittelstand* businesses held on to German traditions. Wolfrum, *Die geglückte Demokratie*, 82.

³⁰³ Johann Klöcker, “Die Industrie übernimmt die Verantwortung selbst. Zur Gründung des Gestaltkreis im Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 14 April 1965; see also Stein, *Unternehmer als Förderer der Kunst*, 15. For different German attitudes toward longevity in production and consumption see Aynsely, *Designing Modern Germany*, 192.

³⁰⁴ Johann Klöcker, “Die Industrie übernimmt die Verantwortung selbst: Zur Gründung des Gestaltkreises im Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 14 April 1965, 35.

Like industrialists in the Federal Republic, the economic planners of the GDR aimed for quality design and quality products. East Germans upheld durability and social responsibility as the underlying principles of production, as evidenced by the DAMW's attempts to prolong product lifespan via quality control.³⁰⁵ Economic planners expected living room and bedroom furniture to last fifty years. As late as 1984, almost a third of the East German population maintained that furniture should be bought only once in a lifetime (see Table 3). The fact that Germans in East and West opposed the American "throwaway society" (*Wegwerfgesellschaft*) suggests that the historiographical debate about Americanization is not able to explain all facets of Germany's postwar cultural and economic development.

From the 1950s onwards, several industry-sponsored institutions in West Germany strove to establish modern standards in permanent design exhibitions, most notably the Institut für Neue Technische Form in Darmstadt and the Haus der Industrieform in Essen. The furniture industry section of the BDI hosted a reception for the press in which presenters elaborated on topics such as "On good and bad taste," "Serial furniture and its significance for today's apartment," "Thoughts on the issue of 'modern' " or "On the meaning of furnishing."³⁰⁶ Munich's Neue Sammlung, a tax-supported gallery of modern design, and the regional chambers of commerce, especially in Stuttgart, not only maintained permanent collections of well-designed products, but also put together traveling exhibitions. On top of these enterprises, West German cities

³⁰⁵ Concept, "Zur Entwicklung der Möbelindustrie der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik Berlin," September 1964, p. 6, DE 1/ VS II 12173, BAB. See also Rubin's discussion of the chemical industry in Eli Rubin, *Synthetic Socialism: Plastics and Dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 225.

³⁰⁶ Arbeitskreis für industrielle Formgebung im BDI, Rundschreiben Nr. 29, 8 November 1960, B102/21240, BAK.

funded a network of *Wohnberatungen*, information centers equipped with pattern books where interior designers counseled West Germans on how to furnish their apartments. By 1961 these *Wohnberatungen* could be found throughout the Federal Republic.³⁰⁷ Most of the initiatives for a modern “German” taste correlated with the furniture boom of the 1960s, when 40 percent of all households were buying furniture.³⁰⁸ Fueled by such demand, the 1960s and 1970s became the most exciting decades in West German furniture development.

Yet this myriad of regional initiatives soon began to weaken the Rat für Formgebung’s initial attempt at centralizing industrial design in the Federal Republic. Conflicting interests of industry and designers as well as differing perspectives on economic progress within industrial associations chipped away at the West German national brand narrative. For example, design centers in Stuttgart (Baden-Württemberg) and in Essen (Nordrhein-Westfalen) developed strong particularistic notions with powerful ideas for industrial development in regions that were already economically more successful than the rest of West Germany. In the 1970s, Stuttgart’s design center applied repeatedly for membership in an international design organization, the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID), where the Rat für Formgebung was a founding member and representative of German interests.

Relations between the Stuttgart Design Center and the Rat für Formgebung hit a new low when the latter became involved in Stuttgart’s ICSID candidacy process.

³⁰⁷ *Wohnberatungen* were founded in Berlin, Darmstadt, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt a. M., Hamburg, Mannheim, Munich, Nürnberg, and Stuttgart to name but a few. Arbeitskreis für industrielle Formgebung im BDI, Anlage zu Rundschreiben Nr. 30, 20 February 1961, B102/21240, BAK.

³⁰⁸ BMWi Report, “Lage der Holz, Zellstoff, Papier und Druckindustrie in Baden-Württemberg,” 10 November 1980, B102/206848 BAK.

Throughout the Cold War, most countries appointed only one design society to this international body to project a cohesive national cultural policy. After all, the ICSID provided an international forum for promoting the national brand in the realm of industrial design. Stuttgart's application triggered a letter exchange between the ICSID board and the Rat für Formgebung, in which information about the relationship between the Rat and the Stuttgart Design Center was solicited in order to determine membership fees. If the Rat vouched for a close relationship, the Design Center would only pay reduced fees. Herbert Ohl, head of the Rat für Formgebung, however, was unwilling to make the case for such a relationship. "I should think also," Ohl sarcastically added, "that they would themselves not like to be regarded as part of the Rat für Formgebung, since we are a federal state."³⁰⁹ Ohl's reaction seems indicative of the adversarial nature between the two institutions. The higher membership fees, as Ohl well knew, had not been budgeted in the Stuttgart Design Center's annual finances, and he knowingly jeopardized a stronger German presence in this international body. In trying to save the national brand cohesion, Ohl deepened the petty rivalry between the center and the region. Nevertheless, the Stuttgart Design Center reached an agreement with the ICSID and became a member in 1979 without the support of the Rat für Formgebung.

Eventually, Stuttgart even attempted to desert the national brand altogether by unhinging economic policy in Baden-Württemberg from the national context. In the 1980s, the region explored supranational European alternatives. Its regional design politics created the pretext for interregional cooperation with three industrial and technological powerhouses in other western European countries: Italian Lombardy, the

³⁰⁹ Herbert Ohl to Helene de Callatay, October 1978, 10-10-2, Brighton Design Archives [hereafter referred to as BDA].

French Rhône-Alpes, and Spanish Catalonia. Together they established the “Four Motors for Europe.”³¹⁰ Lacking an institutional structure and mutual borders, these four regions nevertheless established an alliance for regional economic growth and increased political influence in European Union (EU) committees.³¹¹ The committees collaborated in the fields of culture, education, research and science, environmentalism, and other sectors. Stuttgart’s Design Center played an important role in coordinating cultural and economic events.³¹² This interregional cooperation offers a radical example of anti-centralist, anti-federalist policymaking in Europe. It shows how competing concepts of economic and cultural governance muddled the narrative of the West German brand. Instead, Baden-Württemberg and its Design Center contributed to a multinational brand that competed with the national narrative.³¹³

³¹⁰ Peter Frank (former head of the Essen and the Stuttgart design centers) in conversation with the author, 22 April 2009.

³¹¹ Michèle Knodt, “Vier Motoren für Europa, Symbolische Hochglanzpolitik oder erfolgsversprechende regionale Strategie des Landes Baden-Württemberg?” in *Jahrbuch des Föderalismus 2000: Föderalismus, Subsidiarität und Regionen in Europa*. Vol. 1. Europäisches Zentrum für Föderalismus-Forschung Tübingen (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2000), 405-416; Michèle Knodt, “Die Entwicklungsfähigkeit der Arbeitsgemeinschaft im Rahmen eines ‘Europas der Regionen,’ ” in *Baden-Württemberg und seine Partnerregionen*, ed. Thomas Fischer and Siegfried Frech (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2001), 239-255; Silvia Raich, *Grenzüberschreitende und interregionale Zusammenarbeit in einem “Europa der Regionen:” Dargestellt anhand der Fallbeispiele Großregion Saar-Lor-Lux, EUREGIO und “Vier Motoren für Europa.”* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1995), 164-183; Petra Zimmermann-Steinhart, “Die Entstehung der Initiative ‘Vier Motoren für Europa.’ ” in (eds.): *Baden-Württemberg und seine Partnerregionen*, ed. Thomas Fischer, Siegfried Frech (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2001), 48-61; Petra Zimmermann-Steinhart, *Europas erfolgreiche Regionen. Handlungsspielräume im innovativen Wettbewerb* (Nomos, Baden-Baden 2003), 165-178.

³¹² Peter Frank (former head of the Essen and the Stuttgart design centers) in conversation with the author, 22 April 2009.

³¹³ The “Four Motors for Europe” are a multinational example at the subnational level countering the preconceived notion that federal structures are invariably linked to the central government. Moreover, this subnational multinationalism also stands testimony that European politics do not always depend on the structures of nation-states to implement European policies.

Modernizing the GDR Brand: Streamlining, Mechanization, and Standardization

Economic centralism theoretically equipped East Germany's political elite to squelch regional diversity. In contrast to West Germany, the creation and maintenance of a coherent national brand narrative based on socialist realist aesthetics seemed like a reasonable task. This endeavor was supported by the design institute's progression toward the center of economic planning. By 1965, the renamed Zentralinstitut für Gestaltung, came under the jurisdiction of the German Office for Standardization and Product Testing (*Deutsches Amt für Messwesen and Warenprüfung*, DAMW).³¹⁴ Sitting at the intersection of culture, technology, and economics, the Zentralinstitut's institutional history echoes the leadership's belief that artistic quality determined the cultural value of commodities in the new socialist society. By including the production process and the workforce as the most important ideological building bloc of East German socialism, this new society was precisely what the GDR wanted to envelop into the national narrative.

As the new name implied, the Zentralinstitut became part of the central planning apparatus, thus consolidating cultural and economic power under one roof. However, starting in 1963, economic considerations of the New Economic System of Planning and Steering (NES) took precedence over the cultural facets of a coherent narrative inscribed in material culture. NES was Prime Minister and General Secretary of the SED Walter Ulbricht's plan to put the GDR back on international markets after a period of extreme

³¹⁴ The GDR design institution changed names and assignments several times: Institut für angewandte Kunst (Kulturministerium, 1952-1962), Zentralinstitut für Formgestaltung (Kulturministerium, 1963-1965), Zentralinstitut für Gestaltung (Deutsches Amt für Warenprüfung und Messwesen, 1965-1972), Amt für Formgestaltung (1972-1990).

isolation directly following the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961.³¹⁵ Economic levers played an important role in NES, which attempted to combine traditional command planning with indirect steering of enterprise via mostly monetary incentives. These economic levers, including net profit deductions, taxes, prices, the cost and availability of credit and fund formation, became methods for indirectly aligning enterprise with the Plan.³¹⁶ Some of the levers aimed directly at motivating a workforce that received set wages separate from their performance. With bonuses and other financial incentives, economic planners tried to enliven workers to increase their output.

Some of these lessons had been learned in earlier attempts to centralize aesthetics in the realm of production in order to create a cohesive national brand. The GDR had experienced setbacks early on because of regional opposition within the production sector. One of the largest furniture companies, the Saxon furniture complex in Dresden-Hellerau, continued to follow a simplistic aesthetic. Dresden-Hellerau's functionalist tendency was rooted in the reformist background of the parent company, Deutsche Werkstätten Hellerau, a former *Mittelstand* business. Its founder Karl Schmidt had been an influential leader in the turn-of-the-century *Werkstätten* reform movement, which strove to combine social responsibility, craftsmanship, and industrial production.³¹⁷ Bruno Paul, the famous Art Nouveau interior designer and architect, was one of the most brilliant minds who worked for Hellerau. From 1930 on, he conceived Hellerau's first serial furniture program, the "Growing Apartment" (*Wachsende Wohnung*), which

³¹⁵ For a in-depth discussion of Ulbricht's motivations and goals for NES see Jeffrey Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany, 1945-1989* (Chapel Hill: University Press of North Carolina, 1997), 41-72.

³¹⁶ Jeffries and Melzer, "The New Economic System of Planning and Management," 27.

³¹⁷ Deutsche Werkstätten Hellerau, *Mythos Hellerau. Ein Unternehmen meldet sich zurück*. Catalog for the Exhibition in the Deutsche Architektur Museum (Darmstadt: Druckhaus, n.d.), 13.

complemented the strict functional aesthetic of *Neue Sachlichkeit*. This standardized program offered different furniture pieces that could be assembled as a living or dining room set according to the customers' individual needs.³¹⁸

To combat Hellerau's failure to conform to the Party's demands, Ulbricht personally tried to suppress the company's aesthetic influence. In 1953, he stopped the publication of a booklet about Hellerau on the grounds that the furniture displayed in the book contradicted the GDR's official aesthetic guidelines.³¹⁹ The population, however, liked the practical furniture that Hellerau produced. For example, at a home furnishing exhibition in East Berlin's Alexanderplatz in 1953, which lacked stylistic cohesiveness and exhibited a tendency to bulky proportions, visitors asked for Bruno Paul's *Wachsende Wohnung*. Confused by the display, visitors demanded furniture that they considered to be well-proportioned and cheap.³²⁰ A year after Ulbricht's disapproval of the company's product line, Hellerau's head of development emphasized that, while the artistic department endeavored to follow official guidelines in developing a modern socialist living culture, "it ought to be our goal to maintain Deutsche Werkstätten [Hellerau]'s noted good style or, rather, to win it back."³²¹ Surely, Hellerau represented an exception to the ultimate goal of streamlined furniture production in the GDR. But Ulbricht's reaction and the subsequent collectivization of industry starting in 1958-59

³¹⁸ Bruno Paul designed his first serial furniture in 1908 in cooperation with the Vereinigte Werkstätten für Kunst im Handwerk München. This program could be customized to customer tastes and needs. For a detailed treatment of Paul's pioneering aesthetic in standardized furniture see Sonja Günther, *Bruno Paul, 1974-1968* (Berlin: Gebrüder Mann, 1992).

³¹⁹ Walter Ulbricht to Amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen, 30 November 1953, DC20/3945, BAB.

³²⁰ Hans W. Aust, "Hausfrauen wollen keine Diplomatenschreibtische," *Berliner Rundschau*, 22 November 1953.

³²¹ Kant (head of development Hellerau) to Wurzler and Weber (Combine Dresden-Hellerau), 11 October 1954, 11764/3131, SStD.

attempted to circumvent the individual character of singular businesses such as Hellerau.³²²

Paradoxically, the collectivization process, which was meant to overcome incoherence in the national brand, created even more regional activity and new problems for a national narrative of cultural reinvention. Despite efforts to collectivize and centralize the national furniture industry in the GDR the process continued to take shape slowly. The Thuringian furniture industry was the first to unite private and state-owned furniture factories in the Gera and Jena area under the name VEB Ostthüringer Möbelwerke Zeulenroda/Triebes in 1959.³²³ Cooperative relations between enterprises of all ownership forms, the underlying theory suggested, would yield increased efficiency of resources and organize entire economic branches horizontally. Zeulenroda offered an attractive test case for the streamlining of the furniture industry alongside the successful implementation of cultural centralism in the GDR. With its production centered on stylistically overwrought furniture (*Stilmöbel*), Zeulenroda positioned itself well to uphold the official East German aesthetic. At the first exhibition of GDR interior design in the West in 1959 in Munich, Zeulenroda furniture represented the national brand because design politicians were convinced that its “progressive” furniture production served “the cultural prestige of [the German Democratic] Republic in any case.”³²⁴ With

³²² Hellerau combined forty-six companies into one combine structure by 1980. The furniture combine Zeulenroda included only twenty-eight production sites. Andreas Lauber, *Wohnkultur in der DDR – Dokumentation ihrer materiellen Sachkultur. Eine Untersuchung zu Gestaltung, Produktion und Bedingungen des Erwerbs von Wohnungseinrichtungen in der DDR* (Eisenhüttenstadt: Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR, 2003), 89-92.

³²³ Draft, „Beschluss der zentralen Möbelwerker-Konferenz vom 14. und 15. Mai 1959,“ DE1/26547, BAB. Lauber, *Wohnkultur in der DDR*, 30.

³²⁴ Zeulenroda to Graßhof (DIA), 16 February 1959, DE1/26547, BAB. Zeulenroda was the cradle of curved, handcrafted furniture, a circumstance probably due to its proximity to the Erzgebirge where tradition in wood manufacture has persisted until today.

successful streamlining of the industry, so the theory went, the product range from East German industry would cohesively display a socialist vision for Germany.

Yet by 1962 collectivization proved to be more complex than expected, because a myriad of ownership forms still existed across the country (see table 1). The biggest problem lay in the fact that about 96 percent of smaller furniture companies, employing 48 percent of the manpower, only produced 34 percent of the national production volume. This mismanagement of manpower represented a fundamental problem of the GDR command economy: waste of resources. For the furniture industry it also represented a technological challenge. In furniture production a large portion of companies were artisan businesses, which could rarely be transformed into large-series producers (*Großserienproduzenten*). However, from the 1950s onward, the ultimate goal of any restructuring of furniture production had been the creation of *Großserien* to fulfill the demands of the population.

Form of Ownership (Status 31 December 1962)	Production Volume in Million MDN/UPP	Share (%)	Number of Companies	Share (%)	Number of Employees ; excl. Apprentices	Yearly Average %
GDR	1,730	100.0	14,520	100.0	92,250	100.0
Industry	1,143	66.0	563	4.0	48,015	52.0
VEB	866	50.0	178	1.3	32,705	35.5
HSB	218	12.6	228	1.6	11,670	12.5
Private Company	58	3.3	156	1.1	3,590	3.9
Co-operative	1	0.1	1	0	50	0.1
Small Trade/Crafts	587	34.0	13,957	96.0	44,235	48.0
PGH	225	13.0	415	3.0	14,325	15.5
Priv. Small Trade/Crafts And Small Industry	362	21.0	13,542	93.0	29,910	32.5

Table 1: Ownership forms in the Furniture Industry, 1964.³²⁵

³²⁵ Concept, "Zur Entwicklung der Möbelindustrie der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik Berlin," September 1964, p. 1, DE 1/ VS II 12173, BAB.

To effectively control regional industry and maximize efficiency, the Planning Commission needed intermediate-level institutions located between the ministry and enterprise that could organize industry transregionally. In the late 1950s, the Planning Commission created the Association of People's Owned Companies (*Vereinigungen Volkseigener Betriebe*, VVB).³²⁶ These administrative units coordinated production by redistributing “tasks to allow greater specialization, standardization and the use of spare capacity,” providing the economic leadership with greater control over research and development, which was heretofore located at the individual firm level or that of the combines.³²⁷ However, the introduction of the VVBs created rivals to that of the central planning institutions. Focused on their own industry, the VVBs did not work communally toward upholding a cohesive narrative of national branding. Furthermore, the VVBs remained subdivided in districts that did not cooperate to cover consumer needs across East Germany's entire population, a problem that would become increasingly difficult to overcome with continued specialization and compartmentalization between and within districts.

In 1964, the VVB Möbel started yet another attempt at restructuring furniture production. A Basic Concept (*Grundkonzeption*) listed the shortcomings of the industry thus far and explored options to counter them. Until 1963, furniture production constituted about 2 percent of the GDR's total industrial production, which testified to an immense underutilization of this industrial branch. This can especially be seen in the

³²⁶ Aktionsprogramm der VVB Zeulenroda, 15 June 1958, DE1/26547, BAB; Strukturpapier zur Stellung und Rolle der VVB, n.d., DE1/26547, BAB.

³²⁷ Ian Jeffries and Manfred Melzer, “The New Economic System of Planning and Management 1963-70 and Recentralization in the 1970s,” in *The East German Economy*, ed. Ian Jeffries and Manfred Melzer (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 28.

GDR's technological standards, which could not withstand international comparison. The mechanization of furniture manufacturing lagged far behind, due to years of paying Soviet war reparations and implementing an economic policy that favored investments in heavy industry over light industry. Furthermore, the report noted a large variety of styles and furniture models. For example, there were between 1,200 and 1,400 different versions in the upholstery sector, which undermined efficient serial production and scale economies. Economic planners shifted to mechanization, standardization, and modernization of furniture manufacturing, opening a new chapter in the provisioning and supply for both national retail and foreign trade.³²⁸ Until 1970 the list of goals for the restructuring included: eliminating fragmentation in productive capacities; specializing production by increasing the degree of mechanization; applying modern processing and manufacturing technologies; dealing in materials that corresponded to world quality standards; and the implementation of serial production and *Großserienproduktion*.³²⁹ These modernization measures also shifted focus in national branding: instead of the “keeper of German heritage” narrative, the story developed in a direction that would reconnect East Germany's cultural vision to other industrialized countries. After all, the 1960s was the decade of the space race, great leaps, new frontiers, and new societies, concepts that embodied a global hope for human and material progress.³³⁰

Alongside the structural reorganization of the furniture industry in the GDR, more efforts were made to standardize its production aiming at reaching higher efficiency.

³²⁸ Concept, “Zur Entwicklung der Möbelindustrie der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik Berlin,” September 1964, DE 1/ VS II 12173, BAB.

³²⁹ Ibid., pg. 15.

³³⁰ Jeremi Suri describes the atmosphere of the early 1960s as one of hope for a better future and the time to reap the promised fruits of hard toiling during the 1950s economic reconstruction. Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

Again, in theory, these measures intended to bring all parts of the production and consumption processes into the narrative of the East German national brand, which was changing from historic references to a modern aesthetic. The measures that the planning apparatus implemented included the standardization of measurements in cooperation with the construction industry, the nation-wide streamlining of assortments (*Sortimentsbereinigung*) – a specific type of product range rationalization based on cultural and political motivations – , and close quality control.³³¹ *Sortimentsbereinigung*, in particular, was a radical process that dramatically reduced the numbers of models in the market, yet allowed the furniture industry to venture into mass production.

In the end, modular storage furniture (*Schrankwand*) answered these calls for resourceful mass production, responding to the demands of standardization and heightened efficiency. The furniture “modularization” program that designer Rudolf Horn conceptualized for the Hellerau combine in 1966, called MDW, perhaps embodies this change in production attitude best (see figure 9). Instead of creating one variant of a hundred types, Horn changed the underlying concept to producing a hundred variants of one furniture type by substituting one distinct function with multiple functions for a piece or part of furniture. Boards and panels constituted the basis of the construction concept, which relocated production from the work- and resource-intensive furniture industry to wood pre-fabrication that simply provided the wooden panels.³³² Consumers could

³³¹ Gruppe Holz und Kulturwaren – Fachgebiet Möbel, Arbeitsprogramm-Entwurf der Arbeitsgruppe “Standardisierung,” 28 June 1960, DE 1/ 48691, BAB; and DAMW-Gütebericht 1. Jhg. ’63, 24 July 1963, DE1/48691, BAB.

³³² Rudolf Horn, “Zur Gestaltung und Konstruktion eines Industriemöbelprogramms für den VEB Deutsche Werkstätten Hellerau,” ca. Fall 1967, Folder “Ausstellung Funktion – Form – Qualität Warschau 1967 – Texte,” SiG.

assemble the pieces at home. In this way, the Zentralinstitut hoped to gain more efficiency as well as conserve raw materials in the furniture industry.

The program was based on a vertical modular grid that optimized storage functionality and warehouse turnover. The pieces aligned by 96 mm vertically and 600 or 800 mm horizontally and included shelves, doors, tabletops, desktops, and drawers. Its aesthetic appeal lay in the combination of matte-finished surfaces on the basic structure and shiny veneers with real-wood visual appearance on the frontal pieces. MDW became a best-selling item because of its modularization, availability, flexibility, and the degree of customization provided to the final user. The system's simple modular assembly and disassembly made it easy to move the furniture to new quarters or to add supplementary parts as needed. MDW basically grew, or shrunk, over the course of the consumer's life. Horn redesigned it twice in the 1970s and 1980s, ensuring its production until the mid-1980s. To date, MDW ranks as one of the longest-selling and most successful furniture lines in pre-Ikea Europe.³³³

MDW also stood for the complete rethinking of relations between production, retail, and montage. Retail had to be reorganized to provide first-time buyers with the *Wohnberatung* that would lead to the best solution for any given house, apartment or room, and to offer assembly in a timely manner. Consumers could choose to assemble the pieces themselves without professional help. However, Horn envisioned close cooperation between furniture stores and industry. He quoted Walter Ulbricht's guidelines from the seventh Party convention: "It is here that retail fills out its role as contributor to the People's economy – for the good of the economic efficiency. The

³³³ Rudolf Horn (designer and lecturer for design at the school for applied arts Burg Halle-Giebichenstein) in conversation with the author, February 9, 2009.

economic laws of socialism are better put into effect.”³³⁴ *Wohnberatungen* had existed in the GDR before, but the projected MDW counseling exceeded prior institutions in scale and ambition, revealing a systematic attempt to promote both an aesthetic and a utilitarian vision to the broader public.³³⁵

MDW also exemplifies the division of labor that marked the new *sine qua non* in the modernization of the GDR economy. Between 1964 to 1970, the economic Planning Committee increased investments to concentrate production in local networks. Starting with 30 million *Ostmark* (East German Marks) in 1964, yearly investments assigned to the furniture industry rose to 35 million *Ostmark* in 1965, and from 1966 to 1970 to 50 million *Ostmark* each year.³³⁶ Existing infrastructure had to suffice, as plans did not foresee new buildings or annexes. Furthermore, the funds allocated for equipment exclusively went to machines fit for serial production.³³⁷ These provisions made the furniture industry an integral part of Ulbricht’s NES between 1963 and 1970. The restructuring of the furniture industry included the forced “concentration” of forty local companies in 1965. While big companies saw to the mass production of serial furniture, the small crafts businesses were to respond to short-term changes in demand and fill gaps in the product range.³³⁸ Consequently, companies specialized either in a certain model or

³³⁴ Walter Ulbricht quoted by Rudolf Horn, “Zur Gestaltung und Konstruktion eines Industriemöbelprogramms für den VEB Deutsche Werkstätten Hellerau,” ca. Fall 1967, Folder “Ausstellung Funktion – Form – Qualität Warschau 1967 – Texte,” SiG.

³³⁵ Werner Glöckner, “Komplette Innenräume,” *Form und Zweck*, 5/1980, 12.

³³⁶ Concept, “Zur Entwicklung der Möbelindustrie der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik Berlin,” September 1964, p. 26, DE I/ VS II 12173, BAB.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

³³⁸ This trajectory ironically represents rather traditional patterns of labor division in the German industrial sector. Similar networks formed organically in western capitalism as will be discussed below.

furniture ensemble, in certain technological processes or steps in the production process, or in assembling certain parts.³³⁹

With NES in place, the reality of production and consumption increasingly dictated aesthetic developments. These qualities fit perfectly with the GDR's plans for industrialization of the crafts in large-scale serial production. By using statistical analysis in economic planning processes, the GDR government mapped out all possible production and consumption scenarios at five-year intervals. Design increasingly marked the starting point for the manufacturing process. Working from model designs, economic planners could allocate the materials needed, order the required machinery for production, assign the manpower necessary to operate the machines, organize the product packaging as well as the transportation of parts and finished goods between factories and retail, and coordinate distribution within the sale areas. To control the design process as well, furniture collectives received financial bonuses for successful export products, which heightened the incentive for factories to put their best effort forward in producing quality "East German" goods. For example, the Zentralinstitut and the DAMW handed out the quality seal "Good Design" and assigned medals at the semi-annual Leipzig trade fair starting in 1964. The quality seal allowed GDR companies to increase the product price for domestic retail as well as for export thus reaching their annual Plan goal faster. Accordingly, NES measures also motivated an increase in aesthetic and technological development on the part of companies.

For the future, the planning commission's basic concept expected that the furniture industry would produce a complete and continuous range of functional and

³³⁹ Concept, "Zur Entwicklung der Möbelindustrie der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik Berlin," September 1964, p. 17, DE 1/ VS II 12173, BAB.

modern furnishings. The economic planners demanded “superb quality, technologically state-of-the-art” furniture that should contain a higher “moral” value, meaning that it should be more durable, display greater functionality, and be of a simpler and lighter construction to achieve a better handling and design.³⁴⁰ Eventually, GDR manufacturing thus practiced the principles that taste reformer Horst Michel had envisioned for honest production, which provided a material environment for the ideological education of society in German socialism. Modern “productive” materials were designated to increase moral value. Chipboard and fiberboard, new surface materials, and chemical manufactures, were used to reach these new standards. Rather than safe, traditional materials like wood, the planners favored man-made materials, such as plastic and synthetics (*Plaste und Elaste*) for drawers, doors, frames and entire chairs.³⁴¹ Eli Rubin describes this alternative, synthetic East German modernity as a construction of socialist economic superiority.³⁴² But more than just an economic program, theoreticians saw the chemistry program as a cultural one as well. Horst Redeker’s 1960 pamphlet “Chemistry provides Beauty” (*“Chemie gibt Schönheit”*) set the tone for this period.³⁴³ In the furniture industry, synthetics found application mainly in the finishing of products. While the ultimate goal was an enhancement of the socialist surface, it mostly resulted in glossing over the lack of quality materials. Moreover, these new guidelines revised the previous emphasis on ornamentation and arts and crafts in furniture production. In this

³⁴⁰ Concept, “Zur Entwicklung der Möbelindustrie der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik Berlin,” September 1964, DE 1/ VS II 12173, BAB, 7.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 8 and 20.

³⁴² Rubin, *Synthetic Socialism*.

³⁴³ Horst Redeker, *Chemie gibt Schönheit*. Institut für angewandte Kunst 4, ed. Hanna Schönherr (Berlin: VEB Mitteldeutsche Kunstanstalt Heidenau, 1959).

way, the leadership changed the GDR national brand from a backward-looking cultural heritage narrative to a forward-looking synthetic modernity.

Family Businesses, Esthete Producers, and Industrial Espionage

The 1964 restructuring of the GDR furniture industry strongly related to the state of West Germany's furniture production. Investments in mechanization technology had of late propelled the Federal Republic to the top of storage furniture-producing nations. West Germany's successes became the implied benchmark for the GDR furniture industry.³⁴⁴ To complete the modern brand narrative, however, the GDR planners depended on the cooperation of the industrial sector, just like Western design politicians needed to work hand in hand with entrepreneurial elites. However, the GDR missed the mark on one of German capitalism's important actors: the family business.

In the postwar era, a number of German family businesses that produced furniture grew from small firms that competed in niche markets into international companies. Nonetheless, they preserved their family ownership as well as influence on business culture and leadership. Yet few scholars have acknowledged the economic strength of these businesses and thus overlooked how financial and personal involvement in the company created specific organizational structures.³⁴⁵ Gary Herrigel, however, notes that

³⁴⁴ Raymond Stokes has described technological advances as the key to West Germany's reappearance as a serious competitor on the world market in the chemical industry. Raymond Stokes, *Opting for Oil: The Political Economy of technological change in the West German chemical industry, 1945-1961* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Michael E. Porter's general study of the Federal Republic's competitive advantage points to its high level of education, resulting technological expertise, and inventiveness as the feature of West German economic success. Michael E. Porter, *The Competitive Advantage of Nations* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 369-370.

³⁴⁵ In her recent study on corporate governance in West German family businesses, Christina Lubinski provides an overview of the rudimentary state of the literature. Christina Lubinski, *Familienunternehmen in Westdeutschland: Corporate Governance und Gesellschafterkultur seit den 1960er Jahren* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2010), 10-18. See also Toni Pierenkemper, "Sechs Thesen zum gegenwärtigen Stand der deutschen

the growing family business was one of Germany's two separate paths into industrial modernity, thus linking this form of enterprise to the narrative of German capitalist success.³⁴⁶ In creating specialized regional networks of artisanal work through associational cooperation, a "decentralized industrial order" emerged alongside big business strengthened by the distinctive social ethos of the *Mittelstand* entrepreneurs. In the realm of design, personal involvement of family members and the ability to draw on regional artisanal skills often made family businesses drivers of innovation.

In West Germany, most of the furniture industry developed in clusters in Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, and North-Rhine Westphalia.³⁴⁷ By the 1980s, the industry mechanized with remarkable speed, resulting in more output using less manpower in a decreasing number of businesses. Most of these firms were medium-sized family businesses with a workforce of less than one hundred. In 1977, Bavaria 267 wood furniture producers earned more than two billion DM with exports amounting to 120 million DM with 24,000 employees. Four years later, 264 firms earned 2.25 billion DM and export revenues of 180 million DM with roughly 23,000 workers.³⁴⁸ Seventy-seven upholstery companies that employed 11,500 furniture makers completed the industry's

Unternehmensgeschichtsschreibung. Eine Entgegnung auf Manfred Pohl," *Zeitschrift für Unternehmensgeschichte / Journal of Business History* 45, no. 2 (2000): 158-166.

³⁴⁶ Gary Herrigel, *Industrial Constructions: The Sources of German Industrial Power* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996). The other German path into industrial modernity is big industry. Large companies such as Bosch, Siemens, or Bayer have shaped economic policy in Germany and made the country a global player. For a detailed discussion of the industrial path see Harm G. Schröter, "The German Question, the Unification of Europe, and the European Market Strategies of Germany's Chemical and Electrical Industries, 1900-1992," *The Business History Review* 67, no. 3, German Business History (1993): 369-405.

³⁴⁷ Baden-Württemberg's furniture industry was slightly larger with 330 furniture companies that employed 33,000 and earned 3.7 billion DM in 1979. BMWi, betr. Lage der Holz-, Zellstoff-, Papier- und Druckindustrie in Baden-Württemberg, 10 November 1980, B102/285299, BAK.

³⁴⁸ Bayer. Staatsministerium für Wirtschaft und Verkehr, Lagebericht über die Holz-, Zellstoff-, Papier- und Druckindustrie in Bayern, n.d.; and Bayer. Staatsministerium für Wirtschaft und Verkehr, Lagebericht über die Holz-, Zellstoff-, Papier- und Druckindustrie in Bayern, 14 May 1982, B102/285299, BAK.

landscape in Bavaria. They earned an additional 1.5 billion DM, of which 136 million DM resulted from exports in 1981. With such regional networks in place, collaborations between different branches of the industry contributed to the efficiency optimization. For example the collaboration between upholstery and storage furniture manufacturers led to attractive modular programs that offered solutions for the entire house and enticed consumers to spend more money on one purchase. While only 20 percent of the population bought furniture at the beginning of the 1980s, compared to 40 percent during the furnishing boom of the 1960s, the amount that they spent doubled from 318 DM to 646 DM per purchase.³⁴⁹ Through mechanization and mutual support in regional networks, the industry had found creative ways to sustain itself even during times of economic downturn and the dawning saturation of the market. Continued technological reinvention of West German living environments added to the sustainability of the medium-sized furniture production.

At the forefront of modern furniture design in the FRG stood the Nordrhein-Westfalen family company Interlübke. Founded by brothers Hans and Leo Lübke in 1937, the company became a household name by the 1960s. Based on the ideas of Swiss interior designer Walter Müller, the Lübke brothers developed an “endless” closet and shelving system in 1963 that revolutionized the German living room: the *Schrankwand*, a modular furniture system that could be rearranged or added to as needed (see figure 10). While there were other people working on similar solutions to provide flexible storage in the living room, the Lübke closet system, called Interlübke 63, won over consumers with its durability and simple elegance. It shaped the identity of the company to such an extent

³⁴⁹ BMWi, betr. Lage der Holz, Zellstoff, Papier und Druckindustrie in Baden-Württemberg, 10 November 1980, B102/285299, BAK.

that the family decided to rename their entire business “Interlübke.” Well aware of, but ignoring *Stilmöbel* enthusiasts in Germany, Interlübke did not follow trends or listen to consumer polls. Rather, the company leaders relied on their own tastes to create progressive and modern high-end furniture.³⁵⁰ As trendsetters, the Lübke family represented the ideal type of esthete industrialists in the Federal Republic: a middle-class family business that excelled in quality design and whose interests aligned with the aesthetic mission of the industry-dominated West German Rat für Formgebung. One of the founders’ sons, Helmut Lübke, even served as the council’s president from 2001 to 2006. However, companies that could afford a selective and exclusive clientele were the exception and not the rule. Expensive, modern taste remained a luxury for most middle-class families.

Sharing a business ethos with their West German counterparts, East German entrepreneurs took pride in their personal involvement with their company, which included a drive for self-determined innovation. An expanding body of literature has looked at the causes for economic underperformance in the GDR with the main focus often lying with large-scale industries, such as machine tools, optics, chemicals, and electronics, which are overseen by boards that share decision-making and strategy. However, little attention has been given to the entrepreneurial spirit of the *Mittelstand* business owners as a factor for innovation and success in the socialist economy.³⁵¹ Yet

³⁵⁰ Detlef Mika (Executive manager for marketing and production at Interlübke), in discussion with the author, 4 June 2009.

³⁵¹ Vincent Edwards and Peter Lawrence, *Management Change in East Germany: Unification and Transformation* (London: Routledge, 1994); Johannes Bähr and Dietmar Petzina, eds., *Innovationsverhalten und Entscheidungsstrukturen. Vergleichende Studien zur wirtschaftlichen Entwicklung im geteilten Deutschland 1945-1990* (Berlin: Duncker&Humblot, 1996); Jeffrey Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany, 1945-1989* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina,

GDR economic planning also affected entrepreneurial opportunities and family businesses during the period of intensified collectivization and standardization, threatening to turn away crucial members of the national brand.

The new narrative of synthetic modernity put even more pressure on the planning commission to keep up with other industrial countries. With a mix of paranoia and hunger for success, the GDR fostered its technological development through industrial espionage. While this is not the place to speculate about the real impact of espionage on the East German economy at large, it is well worth exploring the intersection of entrepreneurial spirit, expert knowledge, and spy activity in the family business Bruchhäuser in Güstrow, Brandenburg. The case of Axel Bruchhäuser serves as an example to show how even a respected and financially well-situated family could feel stifled by the overbearing state machinery of economic planning, with its intrusive policy changes that looked for one-size-fits-all solutions to advance the technological edge of East German production.

Axel Bruchhäuser's espionage story began in 1969, when he requested to be assigned the status of a "travel cadre" (*Reisekader*).³⁵² Reisekader were persons who are granted official permission to travel outside of the GDR for business and/or political purposes without undergoing the GDR's typically long visa process. This permission especially included the Federal Republic, where Bruchhäuser wanted to travel to visit his business contacts in the furniture industry. His father, Werner Bruchhäuser, had built a furniture company in Güstrow before Axel's birth in 1943. Already as a young boy, Axel

1997); Raymond Stokes, *Constructing Socialism: Technology and Change in East Germany 1945-1990* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Steiner, *Von Plan zu Plan*.

³⁵² Company-Party Organization and Company Leadership Fa. P. Bruchhäuser & Sohn KG, 23 July 1969, BStU File "Axel Bruchhäuser," Axel Bruchhäuser Private Collection.

took great interest in furniture construction. He patented a design for a chair made of tubular steel and wicker while still in secondary school. After his engineering studies at the Technische Universität Dresden, he joined his father's firm, where he took over responsibility for technological development and marketing, among other areas. During the standardization efforts of the early 1960s, the DAMW took note of the high quality standard and the continued improvement of production technology in the Bruchhäuser company.³⁵³ By the late 1960s, this enterprise, a private firm with majority state shareholding, produced couches, chairs, and other seating furniture that was successful on the export market. In the FRG, it counted RKL Möbelwerkstätten Neukirchen, in nearby Nuremberg, and Arthur Haendler GmbH, Düsseldorf in the FRG among its biggest non-socialist customers.³⁵⁴

Werner Bruchhäuser, Axel's father, had been a *Reisekader* ever since the company started exporting furniture to West Germany in 1966. It may have been either the request for the seemingly unnecessary doubling of travel permits for one firm that put the Bruchhäuser family on the radar of the GDR intelligence service Stasi (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*, MfS) or the fact that the father had not turned out to be a good and reliable Stasi informant.³⁵⁵ After long deliberations, and an extensive background check that included school documents and character evaluations from Bruchhäuser's former peers at the university, the Stasi decided not only to grant Axel the travel permission, but also to hire him as an *Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter*, an unofficial informant and collaborator of

³⁵³ DAMW-Gütebericht 1. Jhg. '63, 24 July 1963, p. 50, DE 1/ 48691, BAB.

³⁵⁴ IM "Ulrich," Hinweise und Einschätzung zur Entwicklung der Fa. Bruchhäuser KG Güstrow, zu Problemen des Ex- und Importes und zum Verhalten von Herrn Bruchhäuser, 22 October 1969. Axel Bruchhäuser Private Collection.

³⁵⁵ IM "Ulrich," Hinweise und Einschätzung zur Entwicklung der Fa. Bruchhäuser KG Güstrow, zu Problemen des Ex- und Importes und zum Verhalten von Herrn Bruchhäuser, 22 October 1969, Axel Bruchhäuser Private Collection.

the intelligence service, with the alias “Axel.”³⁵⁶ His research in synthetic fillers for upholstery cushions coupled with his technological knowledge made him an ideal candidate for industrial espionage. Moreover, Axel had never openly criticized the regime, he had a clean record in the required socialist youth groups, and he had been a great student in school and at university, where he had become an expert in chemical technology for the furniture industry. Even the fact that he had no particularly political background and came from a middle-class family, which is to say “bourgeois” from the point of view of the Stasi, helped his case. The Stasi concluded that this profile would make him even trustworthier in the eyes of western business partners, who would thus speak to him more openly.³⁵⁷ Once his acquisition and IM training had been completed, the Stasi showered Bruchhäuser with attention and financial incentives to work for them. The intelligence service actually purchased a West German car, an Opel Commodore, for him to travel around the Federal Republic with more ease.³⁵⁸ For two years everything went smoothly. Bruchhäuser and his father both went on trips to Western Europe and reported back to the Stasi on the political, economic, and social situation of their host countries. Specifically, Bruchhäuser’s mission consisted of collecting “operational intelligence regarding offensive economic activities in the economic realm, the infiltration of the adversary structure, intelligence of adversary companies and their centers of interference, accumulation of scientific-technological information and documents from non-socialist countries, recruitment of western economic cadres, and

³⁵⁶ BStU File “Axel Bruchhäuser,” Axel Bruchhäuser Private Collection.

³⁵⁷ Sender and Erpel, *Informationen über den Kandidaten*, n.d., Axel Bruchhäuser Private Collection.

³⁵⁸ Axel Bruchhäuser in conversation with the author, 5 June 2009.

intelligence on operationally interesting persons from non-socialist countries.”³⁵⁹

Paranoia over external, mischievous “interference” in the GDR economy seemed to take precedence over uncovering foreign industry secrets. But informant Bruchhäuser provided the Stasi mostly with technological information about West German businesses, especially in the field of polyurethane chemistry. He also went to the Cologne Furniture Fair in 1970 and 1972 to evaluate the international standards and the technological development of furniture production more generally.

In 1972, however, after Erich Honecker succeeded Ulbricht, the entrepreneurial situation in the GDR took a turn for the worse. Already majority-owned by the state, the Bruchhäuser family business became expropriated under the auspices of the new collectivization policy. Having endured partial expropriation in 1960, this was more than the Bruchhäuser family was willing to accept.³⁶⁰ A few weeks after the announcement of the collectivization policy, the Stasi inadvertently sent both father and son on trips to western countries. This negligence on part of the intelligence service created an opportunity for the Bruchhäusers to flee the GDR. They reunited in West Germany, where they joined forces with an old business contact in Lauenförde, Lower Saxony. They proceeded to take over a furniture company called Tecta and continued to produce furniture, now specializing in Bauhaus designs and other high-end furniture.³⁶¹ Taken by surprise, the Stasi wanted to force the Bruchhäusers back into the GDR by holding the

³⁵⁹ Sender and Erpel, Instructions for Axel Bruchhäuser’s recruitment, ca. January 1970, p. 15-16, BStU File “Axel Bruchhäuser,” Axel Bruchhäuser Private Collection.

³⁶⁰ The psychology of ownership in family businesses and its relation to concepts of family identity has been documented in Lubinski, *Familienunternehmen in Westdeutschland*, 116.

³⁶¹ Axel Bruchhäuser to Ludwig Hoffmann, 15 July 1974, Axel Bruchhäuser Private Collection. The Tecta company still thrives under Axel Bruchhäuser’s leadership.

rest of the family, Axel's mother and his three sisters, hostage. For two years the Stasi tried to follow their every step but eventually gave up in 1974.

This episode shows to what length the GDR went to catch up technologically with the West, and the Federal Republic in particular. The Stasi took the risk of involving father and son in their IMS program, providing transportation, and finances to enable the duo to deepen their business contacts in the West. Bruchhäuser's mission also illuminates the paranoia with which the GDR leadership made policy vis-à-vis the FRG. They suspected manipulation and offensive behavior at every turn of the road. Such hostile projections hardened the lines of the Cold War competition time and again throughout the later decades, often without having any solid basis. However, to a certain extent the investment paid off. Bruchhäuser did report back on new ideas about how to combine chemical components that could substitute scarce natural resources, such as wood or fillers for cushions.³⁶² Among the projects that his expert knowledge and industrial espionage enabled were the new synthetics works in Schwedt. In a letter that he sent home to a friend in Güstrow after his flight, Axel Bruchhäuser pointed out that the technological standard in Schwedt was tremendous, and that people in the West were "pulling their hair seeing how little such technological expertise was put to use."³⁶³

Espionage surely informed and perhaps even expedited technological development in the GDR furniture industry, though taking real advantage of these advances depended on the visionary entrepreneur. But such a figure had been lost to the other side due to the expropriation policies of the state. The planned economy suppressed

³⁶² See for example general director "Holz und Papier," Directive, 9 March 1970, Axel Bruchhäuser Private Collection.

³⁶³ Axel Bruchhäuser to Ludwig Hoffmann, 15 July 1974, Axel Bruchhäuser Private Collection.

the entrepreneurial spirit, dissuading company owners from working collaborating with economic planners. Whether middle-class industrialists actually physically emigrated to the West like Bruchhäuser or retreated into “inner emigration” by refusing cooperation, in the end the government lost a crucial building block of the national narrative.³⁶⁴

“Wir bitten um Ihre Beurteilung”: Consumer Opinion and Market Research

Postwar national branding established a direct link between production and consumption by inscribing a narrative into products. In the case of West Germany, the brand was particularly national by design, but it shared its modern edge with other European countries. In the East German case, branding changed from serving as keeper of German culture to articulating a socialist synthetic modernity more international in character.³⁶⁵ The narrativity of material culture can explain consumer choices based on fashions, personal tastes, and projections of self-image. Accordingly, consumers purchase the representation of values, “a narrative, in the form of a desk or a chair, that they circulated to others by displaying the items in their homes or offices.”³⁶⁶ The act of consumption, then, symbolizes the population’s acceptance or rejection of the national

³⁶⁴ The term “inner emigration” (*innere Emigration*) is part of a larger discussion about individual political responsibility under authoritative governments. German author Frank Thiess coined the term in 1945 when he defended German writers who decided to stay in Germany. It describes an internalized critical attitude toward political elites that is rarely addressed in public. See for example Hoffmann, Charles W. “Opposition und Innere Emigration: Zwei Aspekte des ‘Anderen Deutschlands’.” In *Exil und Innere Emigration II: Internationale Tagung in St. Louis*. Ed. Peter Uwe Hohendahl and Egon Schwarz (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1973), 119-140.

³⁶⁵ Paul Betts notes that the styles referenced in the making of national aesthetics in GDR furniture design were ironically international by definition, for example Chippendale. However, these past and even bourgeois styles “could be safely rediscovered under the umbrella of a broadly defined ‘socialist style’.” Paul Betts, “Building Socialism at Home: The Case of East German Interiors,” in *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics*, ed. Katherine Pence and Paul Betts (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 106.

³⁶⁶ Per Hansen, “Networks, Narratives, and Markets: The Rise and Decline of Danish Modern Furniture, 1930-1970,” *Business History Review* 80, no. 3 (2006): 452.

brand. In this way, consumption became an integral part to the success or failure of official aesthetics in interior design in East and West.

From the early days of the German Democratic Republic design educators made a great effort to include the population in the branding of postwar East Germany. Interior design shows offered an opportunity for direct interaction between design visionaries and the general public. In 1952, the Institut für angewandte Kunst, the later Zentralinstitut, organized an exhibition presenting the official vision of the GDR leadership, asking the population to judge the displayed products. This evaluation by the masses, the catalog informed visitors, constituted an “important democratic cultural task,” as the public judged the current industrial production “with the goal of influencing their further development and of scrutinizing those distributors and buyers who brought the mediocre and the bad instead of the best into retail.”³⁶⁷ The GDR thus fortified the chain between production and consumption by actively fostering the participation of consumers in writing a national narrative. Yet the Formalism Debate and its aesthetic diktat curtailed this initial conversation between the population and institutions that created objects of the human environment. Eventually, public opinion polls proved to be an outlet for participatory democratic expectations among the population rather than a true attempt to integrate consumer opinion in the realities of production.

Shortly after the Formalism Debate, the Institut put together exhibitions that often stood in stark contrast to the official style guidelines, for example in cooperation with furniture companies that kept a modern outlook such as Hellerau. Angry comments in the guestbook of the 1956 show “Industrial products - functional and beautiful”

³⁶⁷ Catalog, *Industriewaren von Heute. Wir bitten um Ihre Beurteilung*, Institut für angewandte Kunst, Berlin, 1952, SiG.

(“*Industriewaren - zweckmäßig und schön*”) at Alexanderplatz in East Berlin attested to the customers' disgruntlement. Seeing beautiful and modern sample furniture at the exhibit highlighted the drab reality in stores where the stylistic mix of German socialist historicism held sway. One guest even called the exhibition a “smoke screen” hiding the real state of the socialist interior design industry.³⁶⁸

The result of visitors' frustration with the inability of the leadership to organize a more modern economy touched a sore spot of the GDR during the 1950s. It resulted in eastern pilgrimages to West Berlin, the island of capitalism surrounded by socialism. “It’s always the same. Retail, that is the government, has only to blame itself if we go to the West to see or even buy well-designed products!” one visitor remarked disappointedly, knowing that the GDR had the potential to produce modern items after seeing them displayed in the exhibition. “This [exhibition] is proof that we also have such things. Where can I buy the nice little upholstered lounge chairs from Hellerau?”³⁶⁹ To engage the economic planners, consumer comments used ideological rhetoric: “Fulfilling personal needs is the best cultural education (*Kultur-Erziehung*). How can we benefit from the most beautiful exhibition if everything is destined for export?”³⁷⁰ The aggravation of the population jumps out at the reader of these remarks. Most of the commentators signed their critique with full name and address, which indicates that they neither feared repression nor punishment for their candor. “This book with its contents can be described as an ‘arraignment;’ an arraignment because it uncovers openly and consistently the idleness of retail and partially even that of the industry,” one of the last

³⁶⁸ I. Hämmerling, guestbook “*Industriewaren – zweckmäßig und schön*,” June 1956, SiG.

³⁶⁹ Signature illegible, guestbook “*Industriewaren – zweckmäßig und schön*,” June 1956, SiG.

³⁷⁰ Ernst Riech, guestbook “*Industriewaren – zweckmäßig und schön*,” June 1956, SiG.

comments summed up the general tone of the guestbook.³⁷¹ This document offers early testimony to the way in which the GDR leadership increasingly managed popular discontent by the late 1960s once it became clear that the reconstruction-period promises of delayed gratification would not come true.³⁷²

Indeed, ten years later, the critique had not changed. At the occasion of the modern living design exhibition Modern Dwelling (*Modernes Wohnen*) in Hoyerswerda in 1965, similar comments about retail's failure to embrace modern furniture distribution appeared in the guestbook. Visitors of the show placed special blame on the retail buyers and proposed that "the HO [Handelsorganisation] and Konsum buyers of Hoyerswerda should acquire good taste by seeing the original [in this exhibition]. Hopefully then there will be good products available in our stores."³⁷³ Against the backdrop of the Formalism Debate and the consecutive oft-changing style directives from the leadership, though, the public also understood insecurities on part of the buyers urging them "to buy and act bravely!"³⁷⁴ Here it became evident that many GDR citizens preferred modern idioms to the opulent kitsch of socialist historicism. In the 1950s, there existed no agreement between the leadership and the populace about the "look" of German socialism. Middlemen, industrialists, and buyers grew insecure and often simply followed their personal taste or tried to stay true to the company's style. In the 1960s, when the branding slowly changed to a "socialist modern," production and retail had to undergo a complete restructuring in order to fulfill this new vision. Structural problems in the organization of

³⁷¹ Dieter Chartie, guest book "Industriewaren – zweckmäßig und schön," 28 June 1956, SiG.

³⁷² For more on the GDR's strategies for domestic stability see Jeannette Z. Madarász, *Conflict and Compromise in East Germany, 1971-1989: A Precarious Stability* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

³⁷³ Manfred Müller, guestbook "Modernes Wohnen," 1965, SiG.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

the GDR economy seemed to be the true cause of consumption disruption and the incomplete modernization of GDR workshops and homes in the long run.

The subdivision of the economy into districts hindered a sustainable consumer product supply to the population. Mainly, the mismatch between production and consumption resulted from the GDR's high standard of "societal division of labor and the resulting positioning of production sites for specific consumer goods."³⁷⁵ The industry in each district was supposed to cover the consumption needs of the entire region, which posed no problem in regard to foodstuffs or articles of personal hygiene and clothes. However, in regard to furniture, the situation became more difficult. Despite efforts to streamline the furniture assortment in the GDR, each of the furniture combines maintained a specific style, divergent from others. Oftentimes, regional production and consumption did not overlap. This problem persisted until the final days of the GDR. Interdistrict exchange of goods was extremely limited, which in turn negatively affected the availability of specific furniture sets and add-on systems across the country.³⁷⁶ If somebody who had set up house in the district of Dresden with ready access to the very particular furniture of Hellerau moved to Schwerin at the Baltic Sea coast, he or she was left with two options. Either start over, furnishing the home with new furniture, which would be extremely costly, or add pieces of furniture produced in the new home district, which might compromise their aesthetic vision. No matter how trivial these problems might seem, they affected the quality of living in the GDR and the support of the national brand by a disgruntled population.

³⁷⁵ Herbert Fischer and Georg Wittek, "Ergebnisse der Untersuchungen des Teilabschnittes Warenbewegung Möbel," 28 February 1959, p. 21, DL 102/72, BAB.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

In line with the scientification of socialism under Khrushchev, the GDR established Market Research mechanisms to coordinate supply and demand starting in 1962. This new interest in consumer behavior originated with the “consumer turn” of 1958, which heralded an ideological shift away from an economy exclusively based on heavy industry to an increasing consideration of consumer demands.³⁷⁷ This ideological turn predated the restructuring of economic policy in Ulbricht’s NES by five years. As paradoxical as conducting market research in a centrally planned economy might sound, the *Institut für Bedarfsforschung* (*Institut für Marktforschung* after 1967) contributed tremendously to the configuration of Five-Year Plans. Conducting polls among consumers, comparing past production rates with actual demand, and calculating and analyzing the predicted consumption of goods belonged to its tasks. The institute saw its mission as one of “understanding and explaining the antagonism between production and consumption, supply and demand, communal and individual interests, communal and individual consciousness” via consumer motivation research.³⁷⁸ In this fashion, market researchers searched for ways to redress discrepancies in the socialist “planning of the market” – a contradiction in and of itself. Foreseeing business landscapes for five-year intervals based on this data presented an insurmountable task, yet the planning apparatus continued to attempt to reach budget conclusions and anticipate demand despite recurring

³⁷⁷ Eli Rubin coined this term to place special emphasis on the 1958 Fifth Party Congress where a course correction reoriented the industrial production of the GDR toward consumer goods. Rubin, *Synthetic Socialism*, 33. This was a first step towards Ulbricht’s New Economic System, which completed this shift in economic ideology by implementing structural reorientation of the economy toward consumer production. By the late 1960s, the Politburo aborted NES and returned to the authoritative Plan.

³⁷⁸ “Die Anwendung der Motivforschung in der sozialistischen Konsumgüterforschung,” n.d., DL102/VA268, BAB.

proof that the estimates were off on both the consumer and the producer end of the equation.³⁷⁹

Nonetheless, the presence of a market research institute in a planned economy illustrates how the GDR tried to balance ideological boundaries and the uniformity of standardized materiality with the appeasement of consumer demands.³⁸⁰ By 1971, a period when prefabricated housing high rises had become the preferred way of building in the GDR, consumers continued to prefer functionality over pomp and ornament.³⁸¹ According to a market research survey, half of the population liked the new add-on furniture systems, such as MDW. More than 40 percent of the population liked the idea of extra storage for clothes in the living room. Among consumers who had a one-bedroom apartment, where the parents used the living room as their bedroom, this number almost doubled. In regard to their interior design taste, the population was split down the middle. While 49 percent favored a cohesive style of their living room furniture, 44 percent preferred to have different styles or shapes in supplemental small furniture, such as side tables or flowerpot stands. Regarding dining tables and chairs, the percentage of consumers preferring aesthetic cohesion with their storage furniture (*Behältnismöbel*) was even higher at 53 percent. 82 percent indicated a preference for

³⁷⁹ For a detailed discussion of GDR consumer behavior and the Plan see Ina Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis: Die Geschichte der Konsumkultur in der DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1999), 119-160. See also Steiner, *Von Plan zu Plan*.

³⁸⁰ The 1953 demonstrations of June 17 in the GDR remained a vivid memory for the politicians in the East. While the protests originated with construction workers who were upset about higher work quotas at the same or even reduced wages, it spread around the country as an expression of popular dissatisfaction with the benefits of their labor, including the lacking material conditions.

³⁸¹ For a discussion of East German domestic modernization see Betts, "Building Socialism at Home," 108-119.

natural materials in their furniture, preferably real wood.³⁸² For the economic planners, the study's findings indicated that the population had specific ideas about their living environments, requesting modern design idioms that enabled the consumer to achieve maximum flexibility and practicality. Though synthetic surfaces, increasingly applied in accordance with the modernization concepts of the mid-sixties, were not on the list of preferences, which shows that the narrative of synthetic modernity failed to find full support among the GDR population. Antiques and inherited wooden furniture continued to be a substantial part of GDR interiors. However, the government also encouraged this trend when raw materials and consumer products became scarcer in the 1980s.³⁸³ Attempts to include these variations into the narrative can be found in *Kultur im Heim*, a GDR interior design magazine. In reports titled "Biedermeier im Neubau?" and "Möbel aus zweiter Hand," design journalists promoted the integration of old furniture into appropriate socialist living environments.³⁸⁴ The key to keeping the home "socialist" was to avoid treating the piece as ornamentation, no matter how historic or precious, and rather to assign the furniture a specific function. Second-hand furniture, it was pointed out in 1985, helped to mitigate the gaping holes in market saturation.

GDR consumption analysis illustrates how general popular attitudes towards home furnishings changed over time (see table 3). The number of households that wanted to replace their furniture more than doubled from 21 percent in 1971 to 43 percent in

³⁸² Werner Bischoff and Waltraud Nieke, "Grundlagen für die Gestaltung des Möbelsortiments im Perspektiv- und Prognosezeitraum (Ergebnisse einer Bevölkerungsbefragung) Teil 2: Meinungen der Bevölkerung zur Einrichtung der Wohnzimmer mit Möbeln 1971," 23 July 1971, DL 102/554, BAB.

³⁸³ Work Group for Organization and Inspection at the Ministers' Council, "Bericht über Möglichkeiten und zu lösende Probleme der Reparatur, Modernisierung und Mehrfachverwendung gebrauchter Möbel sowie zur Gewinnung von Sekundärrohstoffen aus den nicht mehr gebrauchsfähigen Erzeugnissen," 1983, DC20/20265, BAB.

³⁸⁴ "Biedermeier im Neubau?" in *Kultur im Heim*, 3/1981, 30-33; "Möbel aus zweiter Hand," in *Kultur im Heim*, 5/1985, 35-37.

1984. While this figure is still comparatively low, it indicates the growing expectations of material wellbeing among the East German population in the later years of the GDR. Erich Honecker's consumption-oriented promises of *Einheit von Wirtschafts- und Sozialpolitik* at the Eight Party Congress in 1971 likely spurred expectations. Nevertheless, the planned economy failed to fulfill these hopes for improved material conditions because of the non-fulfillment of past production quotas and fast progress in prefabricated housing.³⁸⁵ The public housing programs of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s started a large migration from decaying historical inner-city housing to new, sometimes bigger high-rise apartments on the outskirts of cities, which often necessitated the purchase of additional furniture.³⁸⁶ Whereas the production capacity in East Germany would have been large enough to cover the unexpected demand, the economy became increasingly dependent on export revenues, and a large percentage of the national production was sent abroad, as will be described in more detail later.

GDR households with the following opinion on furniture consumption	Percentage of households (%)			
	1971	1975	1981	1984
One should only buy once	34	31	33	29
One should renew parts	36	30	24	17
One should renew everything	21	32	37	43
No opinion	9	7	6	11

Table 2: Development of Demand for Furniture and Upholstery in the GDR, 1971-1984.³⁸⁷

The population grew increasingly upset about these gaps in supplies. In *Eingaben*, complaint letters to the communal, regional or national leadership, consumers made their

³⁸⁵ Angelika Werner, "Die Entwicklung des Bedarfs nach Möbeln und Polsterwaren im Zeitraum bis 1990," 20 November 1985, DL102/VA1751, BAB.

³⁸⁶ For a sample study with calculations analyzing consumer needs see Harald Zappe and J. Braungart, "Der Einfluss einer Neubauwohnung auf die Anschaffung von Wohnraummöbeln und Beleuchtungskörpern," Institut für Marktforschung, 1967, DL102/208, BAB.

³⁸⁷ Angelika Werner, "Die Entwicklung des Bedarfs nach Möbeln und Polsterwaren im Zeitraum bis 1990," 20 November 1985, DL102/VA1751, BAB.

individual plight with the retail sector known.³⁸⁸ Since *Eingaben* were not consistently retained, it is difficult to extract a true sense of popular opinion from these letters. The population mainly used them to criticize and not to complement the consumer supply, which leaves these letters to over-represent negative opinion.³⁸⁹ These letters provided citizens with the illusion that they could bring their concerns directly to the people in power, an emulation of direct participatory democracy and another “smoke screen” that the government implemented to maintain domestic stability. Just like the guestbooks at design exhibitions, *Eingaben* functioned as pressure valves to release consumer frustrations, which the Party invented to prevent civil unrest without actually having to change anything in the slow-moving economic system.³⁹⁰ Prisma, a popular GDR television program that had “taken upon itself” to achieve justice for the wronged in the East German economy, continuously featured complaints and forwarded *Eingaben* to the responsible places, which annoyed economic planners and policymakers.³⁹¹ Ironically, Prisma did more of a disservice to consumers, because it took the focus away from the wrongs in the system and directed it instead toward individual cases that, after some moralizing on national TV, industry and retail were able to fix. With little effort, the

³⁸⁸ Joachim Staadt, *Eingaben: Die institutionalisierte Meckerkultur in der DDR* (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 1996).

³⁸⁹ Ina Merkel, ed., “*Wir sind doch nicht die Mecker-Ecke der Nation:*” *Briefe an das DDR-Fernsehen* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1998), 11; Eli Rubin, “The Order of Substitutes: Plastic Consumer Goods in the Volkswirtschaft and Everyday Domestic Life in the GDR,” in *Consuming Germany in the Cold War*, ed. David F. Crew (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 104.

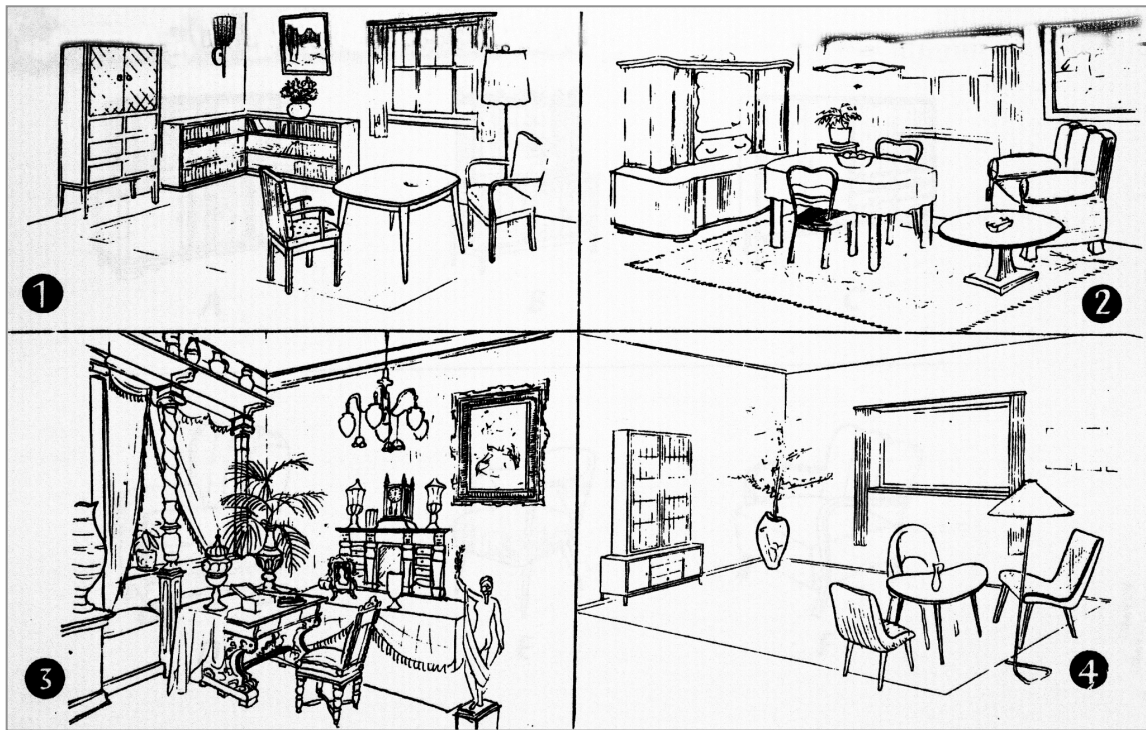
³⁹⁰ Jonathan Zatlin provides a detailed analysis of the development that turned the initial intention behind citizens’ petitions as an instrument of political control into a rhetorical battle over unfulfilled material promises by the late 1980s. More than 100,000 petitions in 1989 contributed to the legitimacy crisis of the GDR leadership. Zatlin, *The Currency of Socialism: Money and Political Culture in East Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 286-320.

³⁹¹ See DG5/6054-6059, BAB. Ina Merkel analyzed *Eingaben* for their rhetorical methods and found that self-presentation as a righteous socialist citizen, open threats to appeal to higher levels of the administration, and references from the political leadership to legitimize appeals constituted the repertoire that GDR citizens employed to negotiate their (material) dissatisfaction. Merkel, “*Wir sind doch nicht die Mecker-Ecke der Nation,*” 24-27.

leadership could create the impression that the socialist economy was able to fulfill demands, although the reality was the crass opposite.

In the Federal Republic, consumer demands necessarily shaped attempts to forge a cohesive aesthetic in the market economy. In 1954 the Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach conducted a survey about consumer tastes in furniture among females over 18 years of age (see table and image below).³⁹² This survey exemplified the challenge of diverse tastes that West German industrialists and design politicians faced in their quest for aesthetic revival. The overwhelming majority, 60 percent of the women interviewed, preferred flowered kitsch, dark woods, and curved lines on living room buffets and recliners. 30 percent liked what could be described as subdued modern or Swedish style with clear lines, blonde woods, and unadorned surfaces. Only 7 percent of the respondents, mostly younger women between the ages of 18 and 29, showed interest in the organic shapes of 1950s American-influenced, “international” design. A further breakdown of this group reveals that better educated female wage earners and entrepreneurs from mid-sized towns favored the modern idioms (the Swedish and International styles). These numbers revealed a slowly growing trend toward modern, abstract aesthetics among consumers. The industry intended to speed up this trend by shaping consumer taste with the initiatives enumerated above, such as the *Wohnberatungen* and industry-sponsored permanent exhibitions of well-designed objects.

³⁹² “Wohnstil (1): Einrichtung, Möbel, Lampen,” Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, 1954, Zsg 132, BAK.



“Of the four living rooms depicted here, which one of these rooms do you like best, I mean, which one would you choose to live in if money wasn’t an issue?”

I like best (%)					
	Living room 2	Living room 1	Living room 4	Living room 3	I don't know
All women	60	29	7	2	2
18 – 29 years	54	34	10	1	1
30 – 44 years	62	29	6	1	2
45 – 59 years	65	26	6	2	1
60 years and older	61	26	4	5	4
Education					
Primary School	67	26	4	2	1
Secondary School	38	40	16	1	5
Town Population					
Under 2,000	69	23	4	2	2
2 – under 20,000	60	29	7	2	2
20 – u. 100,000	51	35	8	3	3
100,000 and more	56	31	8	2	3
Profession					
Worker	69	25	3	2	1
Farm Hand	71	22	5	0	2
Farmer	71	18	5	3	2
Employee	41	41	13	2	3
Civil Servant	60	29	5	5	1
Entrepreneur	53	32	12	1	2

Table 3: West German Survey, *Wohnstil (1): Einrichtung, Möbel, Lampen*. 1954.³⁹³

Yet the Rat für Formgebung's attempts to streamline West German taste in interior design had little success. In 1963, sociologist Alphons Silberman conducted a study in Cologne and Bergneustadt, in which eight different pictures were shown with a more gradual difference than the earlier survey in 1954. All the same, the preferred aesthetic was bulky and ornamented, especially in the higher-income brackets.³⁹⁴ A few years later in 1969, the Rat für Formgebung started a quality initiative similar to the economic levers employed by economic planners in the GDR, awarding outstanding design that reflected official aesthetics with a government-endowed prize – curiously

³⁹³ “Wohnstil (1): Einrichtung, Möbel, Lampen,” Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, 1954, Zsg 132, BAK. This survey has already been used by several historians as it provides great visual evidence for popular tastes in the 1950s.

³⁹⁴ Alphons Silberman, *Vom Wohnen der Deutschen: Eine soziologische Studie über das Wohnerlebnis* (Cologne: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1963), 68.

named “Good Design” as well.³⁹⁵ A jury appointed by the Rat evaluated submissions from industry and design students. Many of these prized designs were assembled in a traveling exhibition that the design council sent around western and eastern Europe. Contrary to the intent, the prize did not reach a larger German audience and was often confused with the much older Good Industrial Design (*Gute Industrieform*) quality seal awarded annually at the Hanover Fair.³⁹⁶

Aside from policies, design, and production, retail played an important role in creating or undermining the national brand. Just like in the GDR, much of the availability of modern designs depended on their distribution through buyers and retail organizations. One of the largest German retailers was the Neckermann mail order business, which had sent out catalogues to 10 million West German homes by the early 1970s. Asked how Neckermann conceptualized its product line, Eckart Rittmeyer, the head buyer at Neckermann, responded that despite accepting its responsibilities as an active factor in furniture consumption, Neckermann did not perceive itself as an educator. Instead, demand simply dictated the choices in the catalogue. Unfortunately, he continued, designer furniture and low prices seldom matched up, but even if they did, he thought that the Rat für Formgebung’s jury for the Good Design quality seal was too avant-garde in its award practice, missing the mark with respect to both the needs and demands of the population.³⁹⁷ Gerhard Krahn, the general manager and partial owner of the small furniture store Gessmann and the larger furniture center Europamöbel in Frankfurt shared

³⁹⁵ Annual report, *Rat für Formgebung – Tätigkeitsbericht ‘70*, n.d., Darmstadt, RfF.

³⁹⁶ Interview with designer Rolf Heide, “Wunschtraum: Einfache Möbel für einfache Leute,” in *Grundbedürfnisse im Wohnbereich*, ed. Rat für Formgebung (Darmstadt: Rat für Formgebung, 1973), 31.

³⁹⁷ Interview with Eckart Rittmeyer, “Beim Versandhaus: Abneigung gegen avantgardistische Designer,” in *Grundbedürfnisse im Wohnbereich*, ed. Rat für Formgebung (Darmstadt: Rat für Formgebung, 1973), 26.

this view in his observations about consumption in both stores. Whereas the typical Gessmann customer was usually well off, the Europamöbel center catered to the low-income strata. Asked to speculate about the promises of functional furniture design at affordable prices, Krahn said that the center would not change low-income consumer behavior, “because this furniture with clear lines doesn’t offer enough on an emotional level.”³⁹⁸ He also pointed out that even the affluent often preferred style furniture (*Stilmöbel*) over functional furniture. However, Krahn observed that the functional avantgarde styles at the Gessmann store sold eventually, and with increasing speed, at the Europamöbel center.³⁹⁹

In the end, despite all the effort put into the education of consumers about Good Design, West German policymakers never succeeded in completely eradicating the typically bulky-style furniture, commonly known as *Gelsenkirchner Barock*, an opulent Biedermeier of sorts, which came to embody German popular taste like no other. In her acclaimed photographic study of the West German living room, Herlinde Koelbl captured diverse lifestyles and their corresponding home decors during her 1980 travels through the Federal Republic.⁴⁰⁰ Not one living room looked like the next, yet some of them subscribed to certain conventions. Next to a couch and a coffee table, the typically German shelf and storage system *Schrankwand* overpowered the room and its inhabitants in most every picture. The otherwise diversified tastes seemed to originate with the idea of the living room as a representative space furnished to receive visitors, a room that

³⁹⁸ Interview with Gerhard Krahn, “Der Möbelhändler: Kein Stilapostel,” in *Grundbedürfnisse im Wohnbereich*, ed. Rat für Formgebung (Darmstadt: Rat für Formgebung, 1973), 27.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 28.

⁴⁰⁰ Herlinde Koelbl and Manfred Sack, *Das deutsche Wohnzimmer* (München: List, 1980).

symbolizes social status and ambitions while taking into account needs for comfort.⁴⁰¹

Especially the middle-income groups liked to demonstrate their affluence with heavy, wooden furniture, elaborate patterned fabrics and various knick-knacks. To this social group, functionalism and Good Design represented the scarcity of the postwar years, a time of poverty and shame of which most Germans did not want to be reminded. While the Federal Republic understood the centrality of prosperity in its postwar narrative of national branding, the selected furnishing style just did not fit the self-image of a large segment of the population.

Accordingly, there can be no single answer to the sociological analysis of taste and consumer behavior in the two German states. By the early 1970s, though, a noticeable change in tastes took place among the larger consumer base and the increased demand for modern furniture would eventually lead to a sinking price structure, as evident in the international success story of Ikea. This went along with an increasing design presence as lifestyle expression in West Germany.⁴⁰² In the East, the boom in prefab housing that created demand for practical, smaller furniture can surely account for some of the fascination with modern design.

Conclusion

Due to the high number of contributors, the narrative of national branding created a challenge in both German states. The vision of a modern, advanced West Germany that embodied technological precision and durability, yet at the same time also progression

⁴⁰¹ Joachim Pietsch, "Gelsenkirchener Barock und Drittes Reich," in *Gelsenkirchener Barock*, ed. Stadt Gelsenkirchen Städtisches Museum, 71-81 (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 1991), 74; Silbermann, *Vom Wohnen der Deutschen*, 242.

⁴⁰² Aynsley, *Designing Modern Germany*, 188.

and mobility, was juxtaposed to an East Germany that branded itself the keeper of German cultural heritage, espouser of a backward-looking historicism that only gradually gave way to a more international vision of a modern socialist consumer society during the restructuring of the economy. Yet policymakers, designers, industry, retail, and consumers came to the market with different expectations. Even the education of retailers and consumers did not result in the desired cultural streamlining under the umbrella of a national brand or a style, one representing an ideologically and culturally consistent narrative through which people east and west of the German-German border furnished their homes.

An analysis of both German economies through the lens of centralism and regionalism uncovers factors that undermined and changed the national brand narrative. The design institutions in both Germanys tried to influence cultural and economic policy centrally, despite, or sometimes because of, their lack of authority and legitimate powers at regional administrative levels. Although the decision-making powers in cultural matters lay with the regional government rather than the federal government, the West German Rat für Formgebung enjoyed far-reaching influence in cultural and economic circles through corporatist structures. Meanwhile, the central organs of the GDR and even the first party secretary Ulbricht could not force their aesthetic and economic principles on individual enterprises whenever regional identity trumped official visions for a socialist material culture. While previous explanations of popular conduct under the GDR dictatorship such as the concept of a “niche society”⁴⁰³ find acts of non-conformity

⁴⁰³ West German diplomat and head of the FRG permanent representation in East Berlin Günter Gaus coined the phrase “niche society” to describe a population that followed policies just to fulfill the appearance of good socialist citizens, but did not really care about the concept of socialist new man in the

mostly in the private sphere of the home, my analysis of economic structures and the relatively limited extent of cultural streamlining clearly indicates that, instead of retreating into the private, disobedience happened in plain sight – even in one of the most significant political arenas of state socialism: the command economy.

Elitist efforts to affect the self-conception of consumers went astray. In the West, design furniture instilled with the clarity and simplicity of a functional, modern style remained only affordable for the higher and upper-middle classes. Since the majority of consumers did not see their emotional needs reflected in the official aesthetic in the West, industry and retail followed aesthetics that proved successful in the market in order to compete in the expanding trade in lifestyle consumption during the 1960s and 1970s. *Gelsenkirchner Barock* survived among an abundance of different styles, catering to the German notion of *Gemütlichkeit*. In the East, the command economy prepared its own pitfalls with Five-Year plans that usually yielded results one could adequately title “planning ahead and falling behind.”⁴⁰⁴ Even as large parts of the population longed to buy modern furniture for the limited spaces in prefab housing across the GDR beginning in the 1960s, the demand could not be satisfied due to the guiding concept of “division of labor,” which ironically fractured rather than centralized the East German economy. All of these factors contributed to mixed styles in German homes, creating a trans-border traditionalism of sorts as an alternative to the states’ modern visions for the everyday. Unintentional aesthetic convergence of East and West German domestic culture then

privacy of their homes, their niche. Günter Gaus, *Wo Deutschland liegt: Eine Ortsbestimmung* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1983).

⁴⁰⁴ Sleifer, *Planning Ahead and Falling Behind*.

started with the GDR's and Federal Republic's similar struggles over a centralized cultural policy, regional economic organization, and consumer tastes.

Remarkable in the Cold War context is the fact that neither Germany's furniture production imitated or culturally identified with the United States or the Soviet Union. Few facets in furniture production acquired an air of German-ness. Emphasizing durability over modishness is a feature with which German design and engineering has become synonymous (even if GDR production failed to uphold these principles, officials continued to demand them). The *Schrankwand* as an example of extraordinary detail and organizational efficiency embodied typically German values and found broad acceptance on both sides of the Wall. In the end, the efforts to create national brands by infusing German homes, East and West, with styles that conformed to their respective narrative met the same fate as Weimar's *Werkbund* and the *Bauhaus* broken dreams of democratizing Good Design. Until Ikea disseminated its neo-functional, modern product line in Germany, designer furniture that deserved the name could only be found in the homes of the rich and in government buildings.

CHAPTER 4: DEALING CULTURE ACROSS THE WALL: INTRA-GERMAN TRADE AND AESTHETIC INCENTIVES OF THE EUROPEAN COMMON MARKET

Introduction

At the 1963 Leipzig Trade Fair, West German designer Friedrich Koslowsky approached leading GDR politicians and economic planners with his idea for a “House of Life” in East Berlin. This furniture store project, which the designer described as a “consumption site with sample show,” would offer GDR producers the possibility to present their products to West German buyers, thus facilitating trade contacts. Based on the hope that a shared *Wohnkultur* and reciprocal trade would overcome the German division, he sought to “build bridges” between the GDR and the Federal Republic.⁴⁰⁵ While Koslowsky never realized his idea for the House of Life, his notion of cultural rapprochement through trade suggests that external economic contacts affect the product landscape of a national brand.

After examining the undermining influence of associational and ideological factions, regional diversity, and consumer tastes on cohesive national aesthetics, the question arises then how industrial design helped the two German states in their endeavor to reclaim international significance. Economic historian Sidney Pollard has shown that exports were a fundamental part of Germany’s economic foreign relations.⁴⁰⁶ As the two German states tried to establish themselves as trading partners for the capitalist West, their special situation complicated trade relations. The Basic Law and West Germany’s “German Policy” (*Deutschlandpolitik*) claimed the territory of the GDR as part of the

⁴⁰⁵ Friedrich Koslowsky, “Wohnen heißt Leben – Das Haus des Lebens,” Frankfurt am Main, 10 September 1963, DF7/3084, BAB.

⁴⁰⁶ Sidney Pollard, “Probleme für europäische Integration im 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert,” in *Wirtschaftliche und politische Intergration in Europa im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Geschichte und Gesellschaft 10, ed. Helmut Berding (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1985), 9-33.

postwar German state. Bonn's position in the German Question relied on two principles: the Federal Republic's claim to sole representation (*Alleinvertretungsanspruch*) and its policy of non-recognition (*Nichtanerkennungspolitik*) vis-à-vis the GDR. Of course, Soviet tanks guaranteed the territorial integrity of the GDR. In terms of trade and economic development, however, GDR officials often looked toward the West, playing into West German policies when it served their own economic interest. This chapter traces how export trade triggered a renegotiation of *Wohnkultur* on both sides of the border.

With the fulfillment of immediate postwar needs for housing, furnishings, and clothing behind them, both German states shifted their political and economic attention to export industries. This change of focus in economic policy had two opposing effects on German-German relations. On the one hand, it pitted the two economic systems directly against each other in a competition for economic superiority. On the other hand, due to the interconnected economic infrastructure, the in "intra-German trade" between the two states glossed over the division of the Cold War stalemate. The Federal Republic welcomed economic interactions with East Germany precisely because they offered an opportunity for East-West dialogue that did not necessitate official political recognition of the GDR. Like Koslowsky, Bonn regarded trade as a transfer of cultural ideas. It recognized the potential to impress principles of democratic political culture upon the East German population.

This unidirectional understanding of cultural transfer limited to the two German states, however, became more complex when the Federal Republic entered the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957. Commitment to a future of Western European

unity eventually conflicted with German attempts at upholding connections between its two parts. The contested territorial situation and the special nature of intra-German trade made the GDR practically an unofficial member of the Common Market, which caused tensions between the Federal Republic and the EEC member states. At the same time, European economic integration brought with it cultural change that culminated in a convergence of German aesthetics in the 1980s. Rather than corroborate the usual mutual Cold War rhetoric of economic superiority and cultural difference vis-à-vis an “other” Germany, this process ultimately led both to adapt their aesthetics to changing economic and political climates on the international markets, connecting them to broader European ideas of modern culture. Attuned to German-German competition and collaboration in the realm of trade and exports, this chapter explores the aesthetic convergence of East and West German design in the *Mittelstand* (small and medium-sized) furniture industry within the European context. It will show that German-German economic cooperation undermined the Cold War division of Europe and presents the GDR as an early example of cultural Europeanization that reached beyond the Iron Curtain and thus beyond the borders of the Common Market.⁴⁰⁷

Traditionally, historians have discussed Europeanization as the colonial impact of European values and technology on other regions of the globe.⁴⁰⁸ But with the increasing

⁴⁰⁷ This analysis is inspired by political science scholarship on Europeanization. See for example Tanja A. Börzel and Diana Panke, “Europäisierung – ein politikwissenschaftliches Laboratorium,” in *Les identités européennes au XXe siècle: Diversités, convergences et solidarités*, ed. Robert Frank and Gérard Bossuat (Paris: Sorbonne Press, 2004), 53-71; Luisa Passerini and Hartmut Kaelble, “European Identity, the European Public Sphere, and the Future of Europe,” in *Nationale Identität und transnationale Einflüsse, Amerikanisierung, Europäisierung und Globalisierung in Frankreich nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, ed. Reiner Marcowitz (Munich: Oldenbourg 2007), 90-99.

⁴⁰⁸ For recent examples of this debate see Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) and

interest in the structural and political growth of the European Union, debates about supranational policy-making and its effects on member states relocated the concept within the borders of the European Union.⁴⁰⁹ Historians have joined this debate on Europeanization, yet they are usually less interested in the institutionalized Europe and more attracted to long-term social and cultural processes.⁴¹⁰ Ulrike von Hirschhausen and Kiran Klaus Patel, however, point to the analytical limitations of Europeanization when it is exclusively understood as a normative implementation of specific concepts closely associated with Europe, such as Roman law or Christianity.⁴¹¹ Instead, they suggest a socially constructive approach that takes pointers from concepts of cultural nationalism and sees Europe as an imagined community.⁴¹² As such, Europe is constructed and imagined by different actors as a social and cultural formation in constant flux. This approach examines discourse and social practice in an effort to understand Europe as an experience community (*Erfahrungsgemeinschaft*) and a cultural space that is not limited to the borders of the European Union.

Sebastian Conrad and Jürgen Osterhammel, eds., *Das Kaiserreich transnational. Deutschland in der Welt 1971-1914* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2004).

⁴⁰⁹ See Paolo Graziano and Maarten Peter Vink, eds., *Europeanization: New Research Agendas* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), Gunnar Folke Schuppert, ed. *The Europeanization of Governance* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2006); Robert Harmsen and Thomas Wilson, "Introduction: Approaches to Europeanization," *Yearbook of European Studies* 14 (2004): 13-26.

⁴¹⁰ Ute Frevert, "Europeanizing Germany's Twentieth Century," *History and Memory* 17, no. 1-2 (Spring-Winter 2005): 87-116; Hartmut Kaelble and Martin Kirsch, eds., *Selbstverständnis und Gesellschaft der Europäer: Aspekte der sozialen und kulturellen Europäisierung im späten 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2008); Martin Conway and Kiran Klaus Patel, eds., *Europeanization in the Twentieth Century: Historical Approaches* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Silvio Vietta and Micheal Gehler, eds., *Europa – Europäisierung – Europästik. Neue wissenschaftliche Ansätze, Methoden und Inhalte* (Wien: Böhlau, 2010).

⁴¹¹ For a critique of the institutional approach to Europeanization from a historiographical point of view see Ulrike von Hirschhausen and Kiran Klaus Patel, "Europäisierung," Version: 1.0, in *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 29 November 2012, URL: <https://docupedia.de/zg/Europ.C3.A4isierung?oldid=76143>.

⁴¹² The main representative of this school of thought on nationalism is Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Verso, 1991). Over the past three decades, cultural tradition and a shared vernacular have become guiding principles in the study of nationalism around the globe. Yet this concept has its limitations as it fails to explain the existence of multi-ethnic and multi-language nations, such as Switzerland.

Similarly, although this study looks at European identity formation in industrial design from a standpoint closely tied to European economic integration, it goes beyond the border of the EEC. It extends the analysis of processes of Europeanization to consider the mutual transfer of cultural values in economic interactions with the GDR. The concept of Europeanization marks an interactive process that includes institutions, political processes, political programs and individual actors at the European level as well as at the level of the nation. In the realm of design, this approach examines how European economic integration affected material culture as an expression of national identity. At the end of this process, both German states contributed to a modern European aesthetic that did not follow one distinct style, but rather substituted stylistic dogmatism with diversity.

Claiming that cultural Europeanization completely cancelled out national identity would be going too far. European identity should not be understood as a variation of its national predecessor.⁴¹³ Unlike national identity that represses regional or international identity, scholarship on European identity perceives of it as being based on the recognition of a multitude of identities.⁴¹⁴ Therefore, while the two German states maintained their special relationship in intra-German trade and used it as a medium to

⁴¹³ This nascent notion of an overarching European culture in the late 1980s has since morphed into repeated efforts to create museums and exhibitions that offer a narrative of European identity. Among some of the most prominent projects are the Musée de l'Europe in Brussels, the (failed) Bauhaus Europa in Aachen, and the European Parliament's own House of European History, soon to be realized. Christine Snekenes and Magnus Bognerud, "Exhibiting Europe: The Development of European Narratives, in Museums, Collections and Exhibitions," Conference report, 07.04.2011-09.04.2011, Oslo, <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/tagungsberichte/id=3644&count=11&recno=1&sort=datum&order=down&search=Displaying+Europe>, accessed on 22 October 2011.

⁴¹⁴ Passerini and Kaelble, "European Identity, the European Public Sphere, and the Future of Europe," 97-98.

influence the population on the other side of the border, they also changed their cultural outlook through interactions with Western Europe.

When East Meets West: Encounters at the Leipzig and Cologne Fairs

It was no coincidence that Koslowsky proposed his plan for the House of Life at the Leipzig Fair. Ever since the German partition, trade fairs had functioned as sites of East-West encounters. In the Cold War climate of ideological competition, the fairs also gained political significance for the two German states as places for comparison between their alternative visions of modern material identity and technological advancement. At the same time, cultural considerations accompanied political motivations as they used the fair to keep the transfer of ideas open. For the furniture industry, the Leipzig Fall Fair and the International Furniture Fair in Cologne evolved into important arenas for the promotion of East and West German *Wohnkultur*, on which both based claims to political legitimacy and economic preeminence. This interplay between aesthetics and ideology is crucial in understanding what Leora Auslander has termed the “communicative capacity of objects.”⁴¹⁵ It instills material culture, in this case interior design products, with the ability to communicate cultural values and social relations that go beyond the mere exchange value of the objects in question. In this way, purely economic transactions gain cultural and political significance.

As a locus of concentrated encounters between consumer products and the general public, fair displays could thus achieve a visual effect that combined economic and representative interests. In the early twentieth century, fairs had undergone a modal

⁴¹⁵ Leora Auslander coined this term in *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

change: a shift from sale fairs (*Warenmesse*) to sample fairs (*Mustermesse*). Whereas trade remained the main incentive for holding a fair, producers increasingly limited themselves to exhibiting samples instead of selling on site.⁴¹⁶ As a result, exhibitors paid more attention to the composition of their product displays, which showcased advances in design and technology. In the Cold War years, this shift encouraged aesthetic competition whenever East and West met at the fair. Appealing displays advertised goods, however, they also functioned as representations of the political order that had brought them forward. While economic considerations surely played a significant role in an individual company's decision to present its products at the fair, both German states were aware of the larger issues at stake. Entrepreneurial deliberations did not eclipse the political implications of product displays. Accordingly, the visibility of their products made producers the ambassadors of either East or West German cultural identity, which gave cause for concern about the message conveyed to the public at large. For example, during a stroll across the 1960 Cologne Furniture Fair, West German intra-zonal trade representatives noticed displays of GDR system furniture for their sufficient quality and aesthetics.⁴¹⁷ The price range of this furniture was decisively below that of West German production, causing not only surprise, but also unease among Bonn's trade specialists. Without the capitalist pressure for high profit margins, the GDR pricing policy made

⁴¹⁶ Marcus Schüller, *Wiederaufbau und Aufstieg der Kölner Messe, 1946-1956* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1999), 33.

⁴¹⁷ Memo, Baum (HDH), Besprechung betreffend Interzonenhandel mit Möbeln auf der Internationalen Kölner Möbelfest, 24.2.1960, B102/20344, BAK.

commodities available to the masses, thus possibly convincing West German consumers of the GDR's socialist promises of material egalitarianism.⁴¹⁸

Hosting a commercial event that advanced capitalist principles was quite a leap for the socialist East Germany of the immediate postwar years. To circumvent this problem, the GDR provided the fair at Leipzig with a politico-economic connotation.⁴¹⁹ During the early years of German division, the GDR leadership claimed that Leipzig was of paramount importance in bringing about a unified German economy (*deutsche Wirtschaftseinheit*). A pamphlet published in 1947 by the fair organization attested an "export compulsion" if the reconstruction and the revival of economic life in Germany should be a success. To reach this goal, the two German states needed to work together because preproduction for export products on the respective other side of the zone border tied the two economies together. If fair activities and economic promotion continued broken down by occupation zone, the pamphlet argued, it would inadvertently hurt the "German product" and contradict all-German interests.⁴²⁰ The pamphlet offers early evidence of East German pragmatism regarding the looming German division, knowing that only a unified economic policy could secure its survival and reemergence as a brand on the global markets. To drive the point home, the brochure offered anecdotal evidence for the GDR's true efforts for German economic unity from the prior fair: "Passengers on

⁴¹⁸ For a discussion of the "lack of meaningful prices" in East German economic planning see Sleifer, *Planning Ahead and Falling Behind*, 31-36.

⁴¹⁹ The history of the Leipzig fair began in 1165, when Otto the Rich, Margrave of Meissen, gave the town its charter and started to hold market events twice yearly. In 1497, Emperor Maximilian I granted Leipzig the privilege of holding fairs. Since then the fair grew continuously into the modern trading place of international significance that it is today. "Historie," 17 March 2012, <http://www.leipziger-messe.com/>.

⁴²⁰ Leipziger Messe, ed., "Dienst am Ganzen," (Leipzig: Messeamt, 1947); see also Achim Beier, "Die Stellung der Leipziger Messe in der DDR bis zum Mauerbau (1949 bis 1961)," in *Leipzigs Messen 1497 – 1997, Teilband 2: 1914 – 1997*, ed. Hartmut Zwahr, Thomas Topfstedt, and Günter Bentele (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1999), 655.

special trains from all parts of Germany understood their unhindered passing at the zone borders as a symbolic act: a dividing line was crossed and, finally, there was space for dealings and action once again.”⁴²¹ Such spatial analogies connecting East and West persisted throughout the pamphlet, culminating in the exclamation “Contemplation of the whole!” (“*Besinnung auf’s Ganze!*”) that paid lip-service to East German commitment to German unity.⁴²² Likewise, West German economic representatives welcomed Leipzig’s all-German activity as a way to improve intra-zonal trade, because it complemented similar efforts toward preserving economic ties at Western trade fairs, such as Hannover or Cologne.⁴²³

While the reopening of the Leipzig fair immediately became a political issue in the East-West conflict, the fair in Cologne seemed to emerge in a less contentious, but related context. Cologne faced two structural challenges. When Cologne opened its doors to fair visitors in the fall of 1947 for the first time after the war, it not only competed with the Leipzig fair that, with Soviet support, had managed to open the year before, but also with other cities in the Western zones of occupation such as Frankfurt or Hanover.⁴²⁴ In contrast to the Leipzig fair, Cologne received no financial support from the occupation authorities. The necessity to be self-sustaining eventually led to the discovery that specialized fairs brought in more revenue for Cologne. Therefore, cities in the West German zones of occupation divided up these special-interest fair events between one another to ensure sufficient attendance by the general public and to attract specialists. The

⁴²¹ Leipziger Messe, ed., “Dienst am Ganzen.”

⁴²² For a discussion of the meaning of the border in the immediate postwar years see Edith Sheffer, *Burned Bridges: How East and West Germans Made the Iron Curtain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁴²³ Dr. Vollrath von Maltzahn, interview by Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk, fall 1947.

⁴²⁴ Schüller, *Wiederaufbau und Aufstieg der Kölner Messe*, 65-76.

International Furniture Fair, introduced in the spring of 1949, became one of the few postwar trade events that still exist today.⁴²⁵ The early years of German division thus saw a flurry of activities on both sides of the border that not only aspired to maintain economic ties, but also to create spaces for East-West encounters. While the economic incentive to participate in both the Leipzig and the Cologne fairs was high for industry, national interests and Cold War diplomacy complicated seemingly apolitical trade.

With the severing of German-German economic unity in the aftermath of the introduction of the West German currency *Deutsche Mark* (DM) in 1948, these communal efforts reversed course. The Soviet Union reacted to the separationist policy by American and British occupation authorities with a blockade of western access to the eastern zone. Faced with this hostile Soviet countermeasure, the West German economic administration decided to withdraw its representatives from the Leipzig fair, although officials feared that it could lose the status of an all-German trade institution.⁴²⁶ Yet exactly this scenario came true: after the blockade ended in 1949, Leipzig developed an exposition-like character, providing the Eastern bloc with a platform for self-representation. The contemporary Cold War description of Leipzig as a “GDR performance show” embodied this notion well, and the barriers that the fair put up to limit access for western companies in successive years only affirmed it.

Once German unification slipped out of reach, the GDR joined the COMECON in 1950 and subsequently built its own economy independently of the Federal Republic. East Germany funded its industrial development mostly through trade. Accordingly, the

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 224-225.

⁴²⁶ Dr. Kaumann to Ministerialrat Dr. Vollrath von Maltzahn, Betr. Leipziger Frühjahrsmesse 1949, 29 January 1949, B102/1931, BAK.

mid-1950s saw an aggressive internationalization of the fair, which was closely connected to the GDR's quest for political recognition.⁴²⁷ In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the GDR increasingly used the fair to display the reputed superiority of the socialist order, not least in contrast to the commodities of the West German *Wirtschaftswunder*. This deliberate politicization of Leipzig also raised questions about the political symbolism of West German participation in the context of its non-recognition policy vis-à-vis the GDR. Allowing businesses to go to Leipzig contributed to the fair's success and could be interpreted as West Germany's unofficial recognition of the other German state. Furthermore, trade relations would stabilize the weaker East German economy. But on the contrary, the Federal Republic supported these economic interactions precisely because they offered an opportunity for East-West dialogue that did not necessitate official political recognition.

In the absence of official treaties, the principle of reciprocity regulated German-German affairs, such as fair-based trade. However, the GDR used fair participation as a political and economic lever. In order to guard the interests of East German industries, the leadership made strategic decisions about which industries received permission to participate at the fair. The domestic furniture industry, at the time a vibrant and important crafts industry on the verge of mechanization, was unable to withstand western competition. Consequently, the government denied Western furniture producers access to

⁴²⁷ Beier claims that the reintroduction of semi-annual fairs in Leipzig signified the East's future submission to Western capitalist markets. East Germany turned to the West for consumer products, he argues, in order to compensate for its high postwar investments in heavy industries. However, especially in light of the hurdles set before West German businesses that wanted to exhibit in Leipzig, his claim anticipates the turn toward the West for consumer products by a decade. It seems to me that Leipzig developed the semi-annual schedule to rival the international attractiveness of West German fairs, especially that of the annual Hanover trade fair. Beier, "Die Stellung der Leipziger Messe in der DDR," 656-657.

Leipzig. In contrast, West German officials did not take similar actions to guard domestic industry and trade against GDR competition at the Cologne fair. This imbalance upset West German industry. For example, constituents of the National Lumber Industry Association (*Hauptverband der Deutschen Holzindustrie und verwandter Industriezweige e.V.*) complained about the large presence of East German furniture businesses at the 1960 International Furniture Fair. In a letter to the Federal Ministry of Economics, the association pointed out the lack of state-implemented regulations for East German exhibitors in Cologne, while the GDR government systematically excluded certain West German producers from the Leipzig fair.⁴²⁸ By 1960, only one West German furniture company had gained permission to exhibit its products in Leipzig, allegedly thanks to its low price range. Sales of approximately 200,000 DM made it worth their while.⁴²⁹

Quickly it became evident that these imbalances in trade fair representation signaled as much Bonn's economic decision-making as political strategy in the context of the German Question. When spokespeople for the West German lumber industry urged the Federal Ministry of Economics to intervene on their behalf in Cologne, the ministry responded that the state chose to refrain from regulating the private enterprise that organized the fair because of the liberal principles of the social market economy. Up to that point, the ministry explained, it had only advised the organizers of the fair to admit exhibitors from the Soviet zone in the interest of expanding the inter-zonal trade, provided that Eastern traders did not abuse the fair event for provocative political

⁴²⁸ Lieberich to BMWi Fachreferat Holz und Papier, btr. Beschwerden über die Möbeleinfuhr im Interzonenhandel, 11 April 1960, B102/20433, BAK.

⁴²⁹ Memo, Baum (HDH), Besprechung betreffend Interzonenhandel mit Möbeln auf der Internationalen Kölner Möbelmesse, 24 February 1960, p. 4, B102/20344, BAK.

demonstrations.⁴³⁰ Despite this reasonable caveat, the Federal Republic knowingly established intra-German trade relations as a political rather than an economic interest. In the early years of German-German trade, its volume and revenue remained relatively low, which rendered it insignificant to the overall welfare of the West German economy. Accordingly, Bonn knew how to exploit the liberal-capitalist division between productive civil society and the state, tailoring it to the political requirements of the German Question.

Indeed, prior corporative attempts to balance out intra-German trade on an economic level had failed. In meetings between representatives of the furniture industry and the Federal Ministry of Economics at the Cologne furniture fair in February 1960, the delegates ascribed the mismatch between East and West German furniture exports to the fact that the ministry did not prominently feature furniture in trade agreements with the GDR. The ministry offered to solve the problem by listing furniture separately in the next trade agreement, and by invoking the principle of reciprocity at the intra-zonal negotiations.⁴³¹ This was a well-meaning attempt to appease national industry, but separate negotiations between the West German furniture representation and the GDR revealed that solving the matter of reciprocal furniture trade to the satisfaction of all parties involved would be difficult. Hiding behind the mechanisms of the planned economy and putting their national interest first, the East German delegates exploited the

⁴³⁰ Lieberich to BMWi Fachreferat Holz und Papier, btr. Beschwerden über die Möbeleinfuhr im Interzonenhandel, 11 April 1960, B102/20433, BAK; Draft, G. Bauer (BMWi) to Referat IV B 4 (BMWi), betr. Interzonenhandel, hier: a) Bezug von Möbeln, b) Zulassung westdeutscher Möbelhersteller zur Leipziger Messe, 31 May 1960, B102/20433, BAK.

⁴³¹ Memo, Baum (HDH), Besprechung betreffend Interzonenhandel mit Möbeln auf der Internationalen Kölner Möbelmesse, 24 February 1960, p. 2, B102/20344, BAK.

differences between the two economic systems to complicate the principle of reciprocity in intra-German trade.⁴³²

In a meeting with the East German agency for intra-German trade (DIA) the following day, West German furniture industry representatives learned that the GDR furniture industry was incapable of covering the needs of the East German population. Theoretically, the DIA claimed, exports to the West should be offset with imports from the West to close the gap. Unfortunately for industry in the Federal Republic, the economic planners usually allocated import quotas to raw materials, confirming that GDR trade policy generally avoided importing finished products like furniture. In order to redress this imbalance in intra-German trade, the East Germans ironically advised the West German furniture industry to participate more frequently at the Leipzig fair. To advertise their goods and create demand, the DIA recommended, Western producers should furnish a collective display with products “of average pricing and average taste” (*mittlere Preislage und mittlere Geschmackslinie*). Only with a demand in place did the DIA see the possibility of receiving a budget allocation for furniture in the next economic plan. However, it would take the DIA at least a year of negotiations and planning to win this privilege at the Leipzig fair for the West German furniture industry.⁴³³ As puzzling as this charade played between fair officials and the DIA may seem, the West German furniture industry unexpectedly gained greater access to the Leipzig fair via these intra-German trade negotiations. Whereas the need to protect domestic industry remained, the

⁴³² Memo, Baum (HDH), Besprechung betreffend Interzonenhandel mit Möbeln auf der Internationalen Kölner Möbelmesse, 24 February 1960, p. 3, B102/20344, BAK.

⁴³³ Memo, Baum (HDH), Besprechung betreffend Interzonenhandel mit Möbeln auf der Internationalen Kölner Möbelmesse, 24 February 1960, p. 3, B102/20344, BAK.

GDR did not want to damage the economic exchange with the West and possibly lose access to Western currency.

While East German companies did promote their products at the Cologne Furniture Fair, their primary focus lay on the semi-annual Leipzig fairs. There they enjoyed the full support of official policy. In 1964, the GDR Council of Ministers decided to award gold medals to “heighten the political prestige of the Leipzig Fair and to underpin its significance as an international trading center.”⁴³⁴ These gold medals at Leipzig allowed the national industry to set higher prices for domestic retail as well as for exports. Furniture combines could thus reach their annual value quota faster if their products met the DAMW’s gold-medal criteria of functionality, style, premium materials, and “highest international development level.”⁴³⁵ With the economic reorientation toward consumer goods under Ulbricht’s New Economic System in 1963, GDR design politicians and economic planners thus shifted focus away from developing a German socialist domestic culture toward modeling aesthetic policy to compete with Western advanced production techniques. Nonetheless, the award system benefitted most directly the state, namely by furthering its international reputation as a leading industrial nation. In fact, the Party instituted a ratio for medals awarded, distributing awards between the GDR, other socialist countries, and the non-socialist countries, often presenting East German industry in a favorable light.⁴³⁶ At the 1970 Leipzig Fair, the GDR awarded its own industry 35 gold medals for outstanding and technologically progressive products.

⁴³⁴ DAMW, “Ordnung für die Auszeichnung von Exponaten mit Goldmedaillen und Diplomen auf den Leipziger Messen,” 29 July 1964, DF5/5585, BAB.

⁴³⁵ Evaluation form, “VEB Sitzmöbel Waldheim: Sofa Excelsior, Sessel Excelsior,” 5 September 1965, DF5/5526, BAB.

⁴³⁶ For materials on awarded gold medals in 1964 and thereafter see DF5/5585, BAB.

The Soviet Union received the second most medals with 12 awards of excellence.⁴³⁷ That year's official (and hence confidential) fair report, however, contradicted outright the East's propaganda show of socialist economic prowess: "The number of new and enhanced designs is completely insufficient, and their quality is at the most equivalent to world standard."⁴³⁸ By overemphasizing its achievements, the GDR attempted to convince the international community that the East German planned economy could keep up with the innovations in design and technology displayed by capitalist competitors. To that extent, the Leipzig fair fulfilled the state's diplomatic goals as the image of the GDR began to change in Western countries: "The state between Elbe and Oder was not simply the 'Zone' anymore, but was noticed as a modern industrial society – indeed without democracy, though still successful in its own ways."⁴³⁹

Willy Brandt's New Eastern Policy (*Neue Ostpolitik*) of the late 1960s contributed to the increased economic exchange across the inner-German border. Changing course from the conservative Adenauer government's "policy of strength" to cooperation and accord, the Federal Republic utilized German-German exchange in the realm of culture, economy, and humanitarian aid for rapprochement in the German Cold War.⁴⁴⁰ With the ink on the Four Power Agreement that secured the status of a divided Berlin still wet, the euphoria of peaceful coexistence spilled over to the trade fair. West German furniture became a staple at the Leipzig Fall Fair, thanks to three special

⁴³⁷ Fair Report DAMW, 4 September 1970, DF5/5041, BAB.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Carsten Schreiber, "Die Inszenierung des Erfolgs: Zur Funktion der Leipziger Messe in den 1970er Jahren," in *Leipzigs Messen 1497 – 1997, Teilband 2: 1914 – 1997*, ed. Hartmut Zwahr, Thomas Topfstedt, and Günter Bentele (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1999), 676.

⁴⁴⁰ For a detailed description of the Social Democratic Party's (SPD) strategy behind Eastern Policy see Egon Bahr and Michel Vale, "Bearing Responsibility for Germany: Twenty Years of the Wall – Ten Years of the Four-Power Agreement," *International Journal of Politics* 13, no. 1/2, Germany Debates Defense (1983): 69-82.

exhibitions on human environment – the Interscola for school furniture, the Intacta for interior home design, and the Expovita for sports and leisure-time activities (*Freizeitgestaltung*) – that served as venues for Western products.⁴⁴¹ Already in the fall of 1971 the combined display area of all represented industries from the Federal Republic and West Berlin had reached 19,000 square meters. This rendered the FRG the second-largest participating nation, second only to the GDR itself.⁴⁴² Overall, the atmosphere at the fair that year was described as “thoroughly friendly” (*durchaus freundlich*).⁴⁴³ For the first time since 1946, politicians refrained from the traditional polemics against the Federal Republic in official speeches. Another “first” was the official invitation of the West German state secretary to the reception that GDR Minister of Foreign Trade Horst Sölle held at the Leipzig city hall.⁴⁴⁴ The conciliatory spirit of the 1972 Basic Treaty prolonged the German-German détente for another year.

After 1973, the GDR fell back into a more habitual pattern of deep distrust and paranoia in its relationship to the Federal Republic. Representations of Western culture and economic successes grew more threatening by the mid-1970s when Honecker initiated his consumption program Unity of Economic and Social Policy (*Einheit von Wirtschafts- und Sozialpolitik*). Integrating capitalist market incentives into the socialist Plan, Honecker’s program emulated Ulbricht’s defunct *New Economic Policy* in an attempt to cure the shortcomings of central planning. Already a couple of years into this

⁴⁴¹ Memo, Leipziger Herbstmesse 1971, 16 September 1971, B102/106247, BAK.

⁴⁴² The GDR presented the Soviet Union as the largest foreign participant, yet the Soviet Union’s exhibition area was only half the size of that of the Federal Republic. DPA news, “Bundesrepublik größter Aussteller in Leipzig nach der DDR,” 2 February 1972, B102/106247 Bd. 1, BAK. See also Note, Sonnenburg, 16 September 1971, p. 2, B102/106247, BAK.

⁴⁴³ Note, Sonnenburg, 16 September 1971, p. 4, B102/106247, BAK.

⁴⁴⁴ Fair report, Sonnenburg, Messebericht Leipziger Herbstmesse 1971, October 1971, B 102/106247, BAK.

new policy, economic planners realized that the early emphasis on heavy industry had compromised the structures of consumer good production. Because of East Germany's difficulties in fulfilling consumer demands, it feared that displays of the Western lifestyle would threaten the stability of the socialist economy and promote the perks of capitalism. In subsequent measures aimed at minimizing ideological impact, the GDR leadership quickly sequestered the population from the lure of the West. In 1974, the East German government explicitly prohibited fairgoers from exploring western stands in Leipzig.⁴⁴⁵ Exclusively specialists, with the express permission of a company or combine director (*Kombinatsdirektor*), and only in the company of their staff, could visit exhibitions of Western companies. The GDR admitted to taking such measures in confidential talks with the West German GDR Trade Committee, reasoning that the general foreign currency shortage (*Devisenknappheit*), warranted tight control of demand.⁴⁴⁶ However, these complex relationships between political aesthetics and everyday consumption that developed within the realm of intra-German trade cannot be sufficiently explained by looking exclusively at individual encounters at the fair. Rather, the complexities between political and economic goals require a macro-analysis of intra-German trade and its impact on political aesthetics, a field that has not received much attention from design historians. Postwar design scholarship has focused on the historical development and meaning of aesthetics within one social and political order. Stepping out of the national frame allows insights into external economic influences' impact on the development of industrial design.

⁴⁴⁵ Wilitzki to BMWi, betr.: Besuchsbeschränkungen auf den Leipziger Messen, 27 June 1974, B102/284973, BAK.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

Dealing With the Devil: German-German Trade

In order to appreciate the full extent of the ideological struggle aesthetically displayed at the trade fairs, it is important to understand the nature of intra-German trade. The trade fairs as such only served as the stage for a constant back and forth in the economic relations of the two states that was going on behind the scenes. Intra-German trade became an increasingly important tool in the German Question over the course of the 1960s and 1970s. Its handling and implementation on either side of the border tells a story of steady political antagonism that concurred with growing economic interdependence.⁴⁴⁷

The Federal Republic's refusal to acknowledge the GDR remained the guiding principle in its dealings with the eastern part of Germany. To assure its claim, the Ministry of Economics demonstratively handled intra-German trade through an extra body, the Treuhandstelle für Interzonenhandel (TSI), rather than the foreign trade administration.⁴⁴⁸ Meanwhile, the GDR, denying the *Alleinvertretungsanspruch* of the FRG and claiming nationhood, handled intra-German trade through the Ministry for Foreign Trade. These structural demonstrations of diametrically opposed politics in regard to German unity provided an ongoing bone of contention, but did not prevent the two German states from trading with each other. In the West German case, the disagreement even spurred Bonn's engagement in economic cooperation as Bonn hoped to undermine East Germany's demarcation policy. Both German economic systems mutually depended on each other for the rebuilding of viable economies after the Second

⁴⁴⁷ Heretofore unseen documents from the Federal Ministry of Economics and the West German Permanent Representation (*Ständige Vertretung*) in East Berlin allow for new insights into the diplomacy of intra-German trade and its development.

⁴⁴⁸ Report, "Abwicklung und Entwicklung des innerdeutschen Handels (idH)," n.d., B102/245211, BAK.

World War because they were interlinked by the production of pre- and semi-finished goods. Relatively poor in natural resources, they developed strong export industries whose success was based on finishing processes by adding to product value. Naturally, industrial and trade relations worked quite well during times of economic prosperity, but times of economic downturn, such as the oil crisis of 1973, put the political opportunism of intra-German trade and the goodwill of Western entrepreneurs to the test.

Until 1971, the GDR avoided imports of finished products like furniture, to save scarce foreign currency for much-needed raw materials.⁴⁴⁹ Instead, the planners of the GDR economy pushed exports to the West to earn foreign currency. By 1958, East German exports of furniture numbered only 835,000 accounting units, yet they increased steadily over the course of the 1960s.⁴⁵⁰ This growth of the GDR as a furniture export nation can be traced back to the collectivization of 1958, which created enormous production capacities for bulk goods.⁴⁵¹ Meanwhile, the West German furniture industry remained unsuccessful in procuring orders from the GDR, a trend that persisted throughout the Cold War period. As the Federal Ministry of Economics' hesitance to enforce the principle of reciprocity in trade fair participation showed earlier, rather than pursuing domestic economic interest, the Federal Republic integrated German-German trade policy into an overall strategy for maintaining relations with the GDR. The low economic pay-off for the West indicates the political nature of West Germany's trade with the East. In the process, the GDR economy "accidentally" grew dependent on West German trade in order to support struggling consumption-oriented industries. While the

⁴⁴⁹ Memo, Baum (HDH), Besprechung betreffend Interzonenhandel mit Möbeln auf der Internationalen Kölner Möbelfest, 24 February 1960, p. 3, B102/20344, BAK.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 1.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

Federal Republic perhaps had not calculated this dependency of the GDR as the outcome, it was surely not an unwelcome one.

The Berlin Agreement of 1951 established the basis for intra-zonal trade, more commonly known as intra-German trade (*innerdeutscher Handel*). Aside from the political decision to fix the exchange rate between the Ostmark and the D-Mark at equivalency, so-called Swing credits served as a financial instrument to overcome the economic oddities of German division.⁴⁵² These credits were interest-free, short-term intergovernmental loans aimed at stabilizing trade between the two German states. While relatively insignificant until the 1970s, the Swing credits became an instrument of political bartering once Honecker introduced his consumer-gearred program Unity of Economic and Social Policy in 1971. As Jonathan Zatlin has shown, West German goods and money started to seep into the East German economy, devaluing German socialism by undermining its currency first and its political legitimacy second.⁴⁵³ Because it was the GDR's second largest trade partner after the Soviet Union, goods and loans from the FRG became a crutch to a planned economy, which failed to fulfill consumer demands on its own.

During the negotiations in advance of the German-German Basic Treaty, the FRG reconsidered the effectiveness of its trade policy toward the GDR. Trade by credit had become the law of the land, which created mutual dependencies: the GDR depended on West German money to finance its imports, and West German companies wanted the

⁴⁵² In reality, the *Ostmark* was never worth a full *Deutsche Mark*, but this provided political support for the value of the East German currency. To the population it signaled that prices in the GDR remained more stable and were lower than in the West. "Thus, the SED's assertion of equivalence helped bolster its political legitimacy and create the illusion that the purchasing power of the East German mark was equivalent to the D-Mark's." Jonathan R. Zatlin, *The Currency of Socialism: Money and Political Culture in East Germany* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), 116.

⁴⁵³ Zatlin, *The Currency of Socialism*, 6.

business, which is why the FRG required the GDR to procure exclusively West German products for the credits. Accounting units usually documented the exchange, which eliminated most of the actual money flow. In this way, the GDR received 2.5 billion DM worth of raw materials, preproduction and subassembly parts, and services from the FRG in 1970 alone.⁴⁵⁴ However, to keep up this level of trade in 1971, the TSI estimated that the GDR had to raise its debts by another 500 million accounting units that year, because it had received 418 million units more than it delivered to the FRG in the previous year.⁴⁵⁵ East German short stockage, the incapability to deliver certain in-demand products, partially caused this imbalance. Meanwhile, GDR purchases of finished products were small in number, which illustrates the fundamental difference that marked East-West trade: the GDR exported finished products to profit from high added value, while it imported semi-finished products and raw materials such as steel (32.4 percent of the annual imports) and subassemblies (34.6 percent of the annual imports) from the FRG that contained less or no added value.⁴⁵⁶ Finished products only constituted 6.3 percent of the GDR's annual imports in 1971.⁴⁵⁷ Had the business community at large known this statistic, the West German Ministry of Economics would likely face renewed complaints from domestic industrial associations. Bonn thus tried to mask this imbalance by utilizing separate statistical methods for German-German trade and foreign trade. Although the ministry claimed that this was to politically contrast the two kinds of export on paper, these statistics constituted a form of manipulation. While Bonn's trade statistics on the

⁴⁵⁴ TSI, Lieferungen in die DDR, 18 August 1971, B102/396753, BAK.

⁴⁵⁵ Dr. Sieben (TSI), Prognose Nr. 2 - 1972, 15 April 1972, B102/396753, BAK; TSI, Neue Einblicke in die Struktur des innerdeutschen Handels, 13 December 1971, p. 11, B102/396753, BAK. One accounting unit was worth 1 D-Mark.

⁴⁵⁶ TSI, Neue Einblicke in die Struktur des innerdeutschen Handels, 13 December 1971, pp. 2-3 and p. 7, B102/396753, BAK.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 6.

GDR offered information about the industrial origins of products, they did not specify the degree of finishing, thus obscuring the fact that the West German side delivered goods of lesser worth, and thus more of them, to East Germany, while the GDR delivered mostly finished products of higher worth, and thus less of them.⁴⁵⁸ Despite all of these favorable conditions for the East, by 1971 the GDR had accumulated a debt of 1565.9 million accounting units, or 1565.9 million DM. West German officials privately welcomed these debts as a solid political guarantee for the persistence of German-German relations.⁴⁵⁹

Despite an increase in consumer products after Honecker's promises of June 1971, the GDR continued to be pressed to fulfill demands.⁴⁶⁰ The earlier reliance on heavy industry had resulted in underdeveloped consumer goods and capital equipment industries, which included machine construction, shipbuilding, and electrical engineering. Bonn knew that the GDR would not have the funds to buy the machines necessary to continue building up the capital equipment industry to further develop the consumer goods program. In a prognosis, a FRG economist looked skeptically at alternative solutions to East Berlin's dilemma, pointing to the traditional interconnectedness of the two German economies and the GDR's dependency on West German spare parts and fittings. Consumer goods production relied heavily on machinery originally built in the Federal Republic.⁴⁶¹ Without natural resources to sell for foreign currency, the GDR

⁴⁵⁸ TSI, Neue Einblicke in die Struktur des innerdeutschen Handels, 13 December 1971, pp. 1-2, B102/396753, BAK.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁰ For details on the dynamics between supply and demand see Ina Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis. Die Geschichte der Konsumkultur in der DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1999); Annette Kaminsky, *Wohlstand, Schönheit Glück. Kleine Konsumgeschichte der DDR* (Munich: Beck, 2001), Judd Stitzel, *Fashioning Socialism: Clothing, Politics, and Consumer Culture in East Germany* (Oxford: Berg, 2005); Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, eds. *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

⁴⁶¹ Dr. Sieben (TSI), Prognose Nr. 2 - 1972, 15 April 1972, B102/396753, BAK.

faced the dilemma of financing increased consumer goods production with the export of finished products, thus sending abroad the very objects that its own population needed.⁴⁶²

Yet in the end, these funds financed imports of steel and other construction materials for Honecker's second ambitious project: the housing program.⁴⁶³ Well aware of these simultaneous and contradictory investment projects for 1972, the West German Ministry of Economics estimated that the GDR needed to reduce its imports by 100 million DM in order to avoid further debts. At the same time, its iron and steel purchases had to decrease, that is, from a West German perspective this would have been a plausible reaction, if the economic planners wanted to import western consumer products in a quantity that would even come close to covering the demand for commodities among the East German population.⁴⁶⁴ Instead, furniture exports to the West continued to increase, with the FRG as the main receiving market. In the first quarter of 1972 alone, trade with West Germany grew by 18 percent in comparison to the same time period in the previous year. But the domestic shortage of consumer products was not the only unwarranted effect of Honecker's ambitions. The export-oriented nature of East Germany's furniture production eventually worked at the expense of national aesthetics.

Success on the export market meant a certain degree of adaptation to Western tastes. Coinciding with both Honecker's plans to increase consumer goods production and relaxed German-German relations in the context of Basic Treaty negotiations, the Federal Republic experienced a "furnishing wave" (*Einrichtungswelle*), caused by a

⁴⁶² For an in-depth analysis of the dilemmas that the GDR faced under Honecker's economic policy see "The New Economic System of Planning and Management 1963-70 and Recentralization in the 1970s," in *The East German Economy*, ed. Ian Jeffries and Manfred Melzer (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 26-40.

⁴⁶³ Dr. Sieben (TSI), Prognose Nr. 2 - 1972, 15 April 1972, B102/396753, BAK.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

general rise in wages during full employment.⁴⁶⁵ Large buyers, such as the Kaufhof department stores and the Neckermann mail order business, increasingly relied on large production capacities in the Eastern combines. Although the mail-order businesses had direct connections to East German furniture combines, the West German Ministry of Economics oversaw these trade relations and monitored their progress closely.⁴⁶⁶ Noting that in the past the GDR had seldom serviced special orders, Kaufhof representatives remarked in a meeting with the ministry that this attitude changed in the early 1970s, when the GDR became more receptive to western aesthetic taste. It was mostly bedroom furniture of the lower-middle price range that fulfilled the necessary quality standards and attracted West German consumers. Kaufhof would have ordered also sofas, armchairs, and desks, but the Plan proved inflexible in responding to its specialized demands in these branches of the furniture industry. In addition to the East German industry's inflexibility, the GDR transportation system was unreliable. For example, Deutrans, the GDR cargo company, delayed deliveries to the FRG in 1971 because of the fall harvest. Allegedly, their trucks had to transport potatoes from the fields to the towns. Under such circumstances, standardized, easily transportable wooden furniture turned out to be the most consistent – both in availability and quality.⁴⁶⁷

The dialectic aesthetic of intra-German trade, that is the interplay between demand and subsequent aesthetic reorientation of production, affected the guidelines for industrial designers. As the GDR economy increasingly opened up to export markets in the West, East German designers found their vision of socialist industrial design

⁴⁶⁵ Dr. Sieben (TSI), Prognose Nr. 2 - 1972, 15 April 1972, B102/396753, BAK.

⁴⁶⁶ BMWi, "Entwicklung des innerdeutschen Handels im Jahre 1972," B102/180511, BAK.

⁴⁶⁷ Memo, Referat W/IV 1, Betr. Aussichten des innerdeutschen Handels; hier: Besprechung in der Kaufhof AG in Köln, 14 December 1971, B102/396753, BAK.

jeopardized by the aesthetic requirements of export. In a 1975 interview, designer Horst Michel pinned the demise of GDR materiality on West Germany's mail-order giants such as *Neckermann* or *Quelle*.⁴⁶⁸ Their buyers, he was convinced, undermined his and his disciples' efforts to create a morally responsible product culture in the GDR. With this observation, he indirectly criticized the cultural and economic leadership for turning the GDR production system into a magnet for western bulk buyers. Collectivization and regional organization of industry had created large combines that became viable only with mass production. These production clusters, however, presented ideal conditions for Western retail chains. Michel complained that large businesses like *Neckermann* were only after the cheapest price, thus requiring that East German industry use low-quality materials, which compromised the aesthetic as well as the functionality of the products.

Michel forgot, however, that the backward production standards of the East German furniture industry limited the clientele specifically to those Western large retailers that targeted the low-income population. High-end furniture producers and retailers usually refrained from cooperation with East German combines because their customers demanded expensive woods and state-of-the-art production methods. The GDR economy could not offer either. Even Hellerau, despite its reputation as the successor of the turn-of-the-century *Werkstätten* movement and its skilled workers, could not keep up with Western standards. In the 1980s, the combine cooperated with the luxury brand Interlübke by mass-producing wooden chair designs for the West German company. However, Hellerau was unable to produce one of the two designs contracted by Interlübke, because it did not own the machinery necessary to mill the required details on

⁴⁶⁸ Horst Michel, interview by Prof. Laux and Siegfried Zoels, 18 September 1975 in Weimar, transcript, "Materialien zur Designgeschichte der DDR," SiG.

bent parts.⁴⁶⁹ While Michel astutely spoke to the creative potential of industrial designers and the skills of the furniture workers, the interplay between East German technological backwardness and the resultant request for low-end furniture ended in the mass production of low-quality goods.

The picture of East-West placidness and trade cooperation changed abruptly with the global economic downturn during the oil crisis of 1973. The crisis hit the West German economy hard, but especially industries that relied on oil and chemicals derived from it – such as cushion foam for seating furniture – suffered greatly. As a consequence, these industries turned territorial vis-à-vis their East German counterparts. In 1974 the Bavarian Upholstery Association sent a complaint letter to West German Minister of Economics Hans Friderichs to point out a new set of imbalances in intra-German furniture trade.⁴⁷⁰ Specifically, the Bavarians demanded to be granted the same tax advantages that the federal government provided for East German companies. GDR export goods enjoyed a turnover tax reduction of 6 percent, while it was applied in full to West German products, thus relatively increasing western prices. In its response to the Bavarian Upholstery Association, the Ministry of Economics attributed this competitive advantage in favor of East German products to the “special quality of the intra-German trade.”⁴⁷¹ The turnover tax reduction served as a means to create incentives for Western buyers to order eastern products. This measure originated with the reevaluation of the

⁴⁶⁹ “Fachbericht zur Dienstreise vom 02.12. bis 05.12.1985 zur Firma RKL-I, Firma Lübke und Messeleitung Köln,” 7 December 1985, 11764/2390, SSStD.

⁴⁷⁰ A. Weinbeer (Fachverband der Bayerischen Polstermöbelindustrie e.V) to Dr. Hans Friderichs, 17 October 1974, B102/206958, BAK.

⁴⁷¹ Schwab (BMW) to Referat IV C 4 (BMW), Betr.: Umsatzsteuerbegünstigung für Polstermöbel, October 1974, B102/206958, BAK.

DM in 1970, which had negatively affected intra-German trade.⁴⁷² Because the Berlin agreement had fixed the exchange rate between the *Ostmark* and the DM at 1:1, the prices for East German exports remained stable while they should have gone down. From the perspective of the ministry, the turnover tax reduction was just a measure to even out the playing field for GDR export industries.⁴⁷³ Because of “budget concerns, the tax system, and European Community agreements,” Friderichs explained, such a turnover tax reduction could not be applied to domestic industries, even if they were in financial distress.⁴⁷⁴ Friderichs furthermore pointed out that the East German exports of upholstery products only constituted 1.8 percent of domestic production, which, he assumed, would not affect the market. Whereas the ministry refused to financially support individual branches of domestic industry, implementing the competitive laws of capitalism and the European Common Market, the federal government had no qualms about changing the rules of the game for East German competitors. Upholding good trade relations with the GDR became a guiding principle in Bonn’s economic policy, even if that entailed financial losses or breaking European trade agreements, and took precedent over creating competitive advantages for domestic industry.

Nevertheless, West German industry, especially in federal states neighboring the GDR, such as Bavaria, did have cause for concern. The erratic nature of trade between the GDR and the FRG by the early 1980s shows how Friderichs’ generalizations about upholstery import based on trade statistics could amount to misinformation or only

⁴⁷² GDR Minister for Foreign Trade Horst Sölle remarked in his opening speech at the 1971 Leipzig Fall Fair that the evaluation of western currency negatively affected East German exports. Sonnenburg, *Messebericht Leipziger Herbstmesse 1971*, October 1971, B 102/106247, BAK.

⁴⁷³ MinRat Loos, *betr. Finanzierungshilfen für die Polstermöbelindustrie*, bezug: Schreiben des Fachverbandes der Bayerischen Polstermöbelindustrie e.V. vom 17. Oktober 1974, B102/206958, BAK.

⁴⁷⁴ Friderichs to Weinbeer, 26 November 1974, B102/206958, BAK.

momentary truths. Because of bulk production and differing Plan priorities, the availability of specific furniture lacked consistency. Nevertheless, the furniture sector was the fastest-growing entry in the lumber product trade between East and West Germany (see table 4).

Jan.-June	1980	1981	1982
In mio. VE	110,9	135	150.8
Real increase in mio. VE		+ 24.1	+15.8
In percent		22	12

Table 4: West German Imports of East German Lumber Products, 1980-1982.⁴⁷⁵

Jan.-June	1980	1981	Real increase in mio VE	In percent
Sofas and divan beds	14.7	29.0	+ 14.3	97.3
Wardrobes	0.3	4.4	+ 4.1	-
Chests of drawers	1.9	4.6	+ 2.7	142.1
Living room furniture systems	5.3	6.4	+ 1.1	20.8
Kitchen chairs	5.4	6.0	+ 0.6	11.1
Armchairs	20.8	12.4	- 8.4	40.0

Table 5: West German Imports of East German Furniture, 1980-1981.

Jan.-June	1981	1983	Real increase in mio VE	In percent
Armchairs	12.4	31.5	+ 19.1	+ 154
Add-on Furniture	-	23.8	+ 23.8	-
Kitchen Tables	-	11.9	+ 11.9	-
Wooden Bed Rests	8.1	11.5	+ 3.4	+ 42
Sofas and divan beds	29.0	14.9	- 14.1	- 49

Table 6: West German Imports of East German Furniture, 1981-1982

The tables above provide a small glimpse of the flexibility that West German buyers had to demonstrate in dealing with the GDR planned economy (see tables 5 and 6). Inconsistencies in the Plan could result in the overproduction of certain furniture in any

⁴⁷⁵ Note, Schaefer, Ergebnisse des IdH im 1. Halbjahr 1981, 24 August 1981; Note, Schaefer, Ergebnisse des IdH im 1. Halbjahr 1982, 23 August 1982, B102/396753, BAK.

given year. In 1981, this happened to be sofas, which resulted in a growth of sofa exports to the Federal Republic by 97.3 percent. The following year the pattern changed to armchairs with an increase of 154 percent, while the purchase of sofas balanced itself out with a decrease of 49 percent. Seeing that giant furniture retailers such as Ikea and RKL Möbel found themselves on the receiving end of these gyrations makes one wonder how they could calculate their product range while dependent on GDR production.⁴⁷⁶ Yet small and medium-sized furniture producers, such as the clients of the Bavarian Upholstery Association probably suffered most when GDR furniture flooded the West German market. The fact that Bonn did not take action on behalf of their industry and played along with the GDR inconsistencies confirmed West Germany's political interest in the intra-German trade.

In a self-justificatory gesture, the GDR turned some of the western trade partners' concerns on their head. At a conference on the "situation of the global economy" in the fall of 1981 in Hamburg, Jürgen Nitz, a representative of the East German Research Institute for Politics and Economy, explained to a surprised western audience how the capitalist path in the global economy continued to disappoint the socialist nations.⁴⁷⁷ The disconcerting results, he explained, threatened GDR trading interests: the slowing-down of industrial growth; the relatively slow accumulation of capital after the oil crisis; chronic inflation in capitalist countries that redounded to the detriments of socialist economies; stagnant wages which throttled down demand for import products from socialist countries; and the increasing instability of capitalist currency, which made credit

⁴⁷⁶ Note, Schaefer, Ergebnisse des IdH im 1. Halbjahr 1981, 24 August 1981, B102/396753, BAK.

⁴⁷⁷ Transcript, Annual Conference "Internationale Politik 1981," 7 October 1981, B102/396753, BAK.

negotiations difficult for the GDR.⁴⁷⁸ That these developments negatively affected trade between East and West, Nitz proposed, ought to be a logical conclusion. East Germany, as well as other socialist countries, Nitz continued, would not accept the blame for the consequences and would fight against attempts to pin these crises and inflationary tendencies on the GDR. While pointing to the shortcomings of capitalism, the GDR displayed little concern in regard to the structural quirks in the planned economy and its focus on political goals that negatively affected the Western European countries.

For a political advantage in trade negotiations, the GDR did not shy away from manipulating Plan statistics to blind-sight western countries to the real extent of its economic situation. To the West German Ministry of Economics manipulated Plan production goals presented similar problems to those, which the undefined course of the capitalist economies posed to the GDR. Usually, the ministry looked to the Plan in combination with GDR foreign and intra-German trade to leverage West German trade policy diplomatically. Yet the Plan often reflected political aims rather than economic probabilities, leaving the ministry to rely on GDR trade policy patters to estimate real outcomes. For example, in the 1981-85 Plan directive, the Planning Commission allocated an impossible growth in the production sector, which, Western economists realized, was a statistical trick to balance and conceal the import purchases necessary to uphold the current standard of living in the GDR on paper. Over the course of the 1970s, supplementing domestic consumer good industries with imports on credit had become a standard solution in GDR economic planning in order to create the impression that the

⁴⁷⁸ Transcript, Annual Conference "Internationale Politik 1981," 7 October 1981, p. 9, B102/396753, BAK.

population's standard of living had indeed improved.⁴⁷⁹ But even these imports could not completely fill the gaps in supplies. Buying on credit changed the focus of the GDR economic policy from long-term growth through investments to the short-term policy of borrowing and, subsequently, to the "immediate exigency of debt reduction" by the 1980s.⁴⁸⁰ As a consequence, the Federal Republic in fact partially financed Honecker's economic reform of Unity of Economic and Social Policy. Western trading partners, first and foremost the FRG, continued to grant the GDR loans and credits until the entire system came close to collapse under enormous debts in 1988-89.⁴⁸¹

The significance of the financial and economic cooperation between the two German states lies in the fact that their collaboration clearly undermined the division of Europe in the Eastern Bloc and the partners of the transatlantic alliance. A nascent undoing of socialist aesthetics in furniture design heralded the cultural effects of East Germany's trade with the West. Cheap mass production for export became took precedence over the morality of socialist material culture, which contributed to a quality decline in both aesthetics and materials. In the end, the Iron Curtain proved permeable from the Bay of Mecklenburg to the Vogtland. Through intra-German trade, West German money and consumer products increasingly seeped into a socialist Germany that desperately tried to gain popular support by creating a hybrid economy. The GDR, though, won a reliable source of foreign currency, which increasingly stabilized the

⁴⁷⁹ Dr. Volze, "Zur DDR-Plandirektive 1981/85," 16 June 1981, B102/236619, BAK.

⁴⁸⁰ Zatlin, *The Currency of Socialism*, 126. See also Jeffries and Melzer, "The New Economic System of Planning and Management," 37.

⁴⁸¹ Zatlin claims that Günter Mittag, the GDR and Honecker's long-serving Minister of Economics, forged trade statistics and inflated the debt on purpose to impress on the party leadership the notion that his planning strategies were extremely successful at decreasing the debt. The Federal Republic, on the other hand, profited from the inflated debt during unification, because a scared population and the shocked Krenz and Modrow governments rushed into the union on Western terms to be saved by the D-Mark. Zatlin, *The Currency of Socialism*, 124.

economic policies of the SED leadership and contributed to the smoke screen of a flourishing consumer society in the East.

Creating the Common Market

The specific characteristics of intra-German trade, such as the high degree of interdependence in production industries and special tax cuts, differed greatly from international norms of foreign trade. Settled in the 1951 Berlin Agreement, the special relationship created by the Cold War division of Europe influenced the handling of economic and financial transactions between the two German states. While this intra-German development seems a logical progression of prewar territorial unity and economic embeddedness, the playing field changed once other parties became involved. When the Federal Republic joined the European Economic Community, intra-German trade caused problems in the Common Market. This triangular relationship between East and West Germany, West Germany and the EEC member states, and the member states and East Germany spun a complex web of economic and political interests dominated by the German Question. It is impossible to understand the cultural dynamism of this export-import triangle and the aesthetic market incentives without examining Germany's political goals in conjunction with the economic interests of the EEC member states first. They formed the basis on which the two German states engaged culturally in the most profit-oriented manner with other European nations and thus contributed to the making of a modern European identity.

German furniture, with its legacy grounded in interwar modernism, remained a contender on the global market and continued to be an important export good for both the

GDR and the FRG after the Second World War. It is thus not surprising that the annual Cologne International Furniture Fair grew to become the most important furniture marketplace in the world. Within intra-German trade, the furniture traveled mostly from East to West, but on the global market, both countries gained important positions as furniture export nations. Already in the early 1960s, the GDR proclaimed itself the world's largest furniture export nation, if only in percentage of total annual production rather than real profits. It exported 40 percent of its furniture production to twenty countries, at a time when the standardization and mechanization of the GDR furniture industry had only started to gain momentum.⁴⁸² If nothing else, this high percentage is telling about the chronic state of East Germany's domestic under-provisioning in the realm of household goods and domestic culture. Instead of securing supplies for its own population, the GDR sent critical percentages of its products abroad. In comparison, West Germany reached the status of the world's largest furniture exporter in absolute numbers alongside Italy by the early 1980s, with three billion DM in sales, which was about 17 percent of its annual furniture production.⁴⁸³ As the Federal Republic imported the same amount of furniture from other countries, its market was saturated.

The European Market has been paramount for West Germany's foreign economic relations. France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg took about 35 percent of Germany's exports in the 1950s.⁴⁸⁴ Meanwhile, the vivid economies of these nations also presented competition. In 1955, the Federal Republic identified Italy, Belgium,

⁴⁸² Lauber, *Wohnkultur in der DDR*, 41. See the previous chapter of this dissertation for a discussion of technological modernization in the East German furniture industry.

⁴⁸³ Memo, "Niederschrift über die Arbeitstagung Holz, Zellstoff, Papier und Druck am 13. November 1980 in Bonn," 15 January 1981, B102/285299, BAK.

⁴⁸⁴ Harm G. Schröter, "The German Questions, the Unification of Europe, and the European Market Strategies of Germany's Chemical and Electrical Industries, 1900-1992," *The Business History Review* 67, no. 3 (1993): 373.

Norway, and Sweden as its main competitors in the furniture export market. A market analysis by the Federal Ministry of Economics found that the rate of export orders for furniture slowly picked up, mainly from Western Europe, but also from overseas, where the demand for seating furniture was especially high. Unfortunately, rising packaging and shipping costs made trading goods overseas less lucrative, which would keep the number of successful competitive contracts low. In Western Europe, however, the demand for all kinds of furniture was high after the war had wreaked havoc there. Yet economic analysts worried especially about German furniture's inability to "jump over the tariff wall" within Europe.⁴⁸⁵ The fact that the German industry had cut itself off from the international market between 1933 and 1945 had encouraged other nations to build their own industries to compensate for the loss of their German trading partner (see table 7 for West German furniture trade statistics). As a byproduct of this process, the report stated, these countries had developed strong national tastes that rendered any mention of "a global furniture market situation" that corresponded to distinctive aesthetics pointless. Under these circumstances, particularly Italy and Belgium emerged as the main competitors, which, although they did not produce more cheaply from a technological standpoint, nevertheless had lower costs of labor. Analysts saw the only chance to overcome these hurdles in "exporting especially high-quality products, that neither the national industry of the target markets could produce nor Italy, Belgium, Norway or Sweden could export there at the same qualitative level and with the same design

⁴⁸⁵ Report, "Lagebericht Aussenhandel für 4. Quartal 1954, Exportausschuss Holzverarbeitung," 22 January 1955, B102/1523-1, BAK.

aesthetic.”⁴⁸⁶ This national approach to export goods developed alongside the FRG’s early attempts to create a national aesthetic in industrial design.

Product	Year	Quarter or Month				
		I	II	III	Oct.	Nov.
Furniture (Wooden and Wicker)	1953	3.3	3.9	4.6	2.6	1.4
	1954	4.1	6.3	3.9	3.1	3.3

Table 7: Development of West German Furniture Trade in Million DM, 1953-1954.⁴⁸⁷

Despite such visions of a national path, the Schuman Plan brought German-French rapprochement in 1950, paving the way for German economic integration in Europe. Instead of isolating Germany in fear of its reemergence as a dominating power in Europe, France changed course and relied on the stabilizing effects of cooperation for lasting peace in Europe. Paris hoped to influence German foreign policy and tie West Germans to a larger European idea rather than traditionalist concepts of national interest whose violent potential had been proven in the recent German past.⁴⁸⁸ The Franco-German rapprochement enabled economic cooperation in the realm of coal and steel that included Italy and the Benelux.⁴⁸⁹ These first steps toward a shared European economic sphere enabled West Germany’s economic success story as an export nation that excelled with the establishment of the European Economic Community on January 1, 1958. The integration into the Common Market solved most of West Germany’s furniture export problems by abolishing tariffs between EEC members, leveling the playing field between

⁴⁸⁶ Report, “Lagebericht Aussenhandel für 4. Quartal 1954, Exportausschuss Holzverarbeitung,” 22 January 1955, B102/1523-1, BAK.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ For a discussion of the goals of French diplomacy see A. W. Lovett, “The United States and the Schuman Plan: A Study in French Diplomacy 1950-1952,” *The Historical Journal* 39, no. 2 (1996): 425-455 and William I. Hitchcock, *France Restored: Cold War Diplomacy and the Quest for Leadership in Europe, 1944-1954* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

⁴⁸⁹ High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community, “Treaty Establishing the European Coal and Steel Community,” 1951.

German, Italian, and Belgian furniture production in the European market, and rendering the Scandinavian countries less competitive. The destruction of the war coupled with initial dismantlement of industrial structures, which were drastic prior to Cold War rearmament, put the production of consumer goods for the West German domestic market first. However, the open Common Market accelerated industrial modernization with the support of American money and technology, which was only one reason for the Federal Republic's later superiority in the EEC. Social stability under the conservative, welfare-oriented Adenauer governments promised foreign investors safe profits and offered them a gateway into the Common Market.⁴⁹⁰ Furthermore, at the time of the entry into the EEC, the national economy of the FRG was well equipped and organized with a dense network of railways and highways, an outstanding communication system, and possessed, with the Rhine River, the most efficient inland waterway in Europe.⁴⁹¹ These favorable infrastructural conditions turned the Federal Republic into a true competitor in the EEC, compelling German industry to acquire more capital and accelerate its (peaceful) expansive strategies.

From the very inception of the EEC, the German Question stood at the center of Bonn's relations to other member states. The FRG demanded special stipulations for intra-German trade, a cause for concern to other EEC members who feared that German-German interests could affect the community. Accordingly, the 1957 Treaty of Rome contained a "Protocol on intra-German trade and related issues" stipulating that German-

⁴⁹⁰ Karlheinz Hottes, "Regional Variations of the Economic Development in the Federal Republic of Germany," 42.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 41.

German trade remained unaltered by the EEC agreements.⁴⁹² However, paragraph 2 of the protocol required all EEC states to relate any trade with “German territories outside of the territory of the Basic Law,” that is to say the GDR, to the other members and to take precautions that any agreements with the GDR would not contradict the principles of the Common Market.⁴⁹³ Furthermore, paragraph 3 of the agreement stated that each member state was allowed to take action against injurious interaction between another member state and East Berlin.⁴⁹⁴

While trade with the GDR theoretically counted as foreign trade, the GDR could not be treated as just another third party. Its special status due to the open German Question and West German non-recognition required bilateral agreements signed at the level of non-state actors, such as foreign trade associations. Its special status foreclosed a common EEC trade policy toward East Germany by definition. In theory, the principles of paragraphs 2 and 3 applied to the Federal Republic as well, but Bonn exempted itself, claiming as its guiding foreign policy the notion that “in all of its actions, the government of the Federal Republic assumes the *political and economic unity of Germany*, whose realization is only obstructed by factual, but not legal reasons.”⁴⁹⁵ For the FRG, the protocol regulated all trade between East Germany and the EEC, interpreting it to mean equal treatment for all German territories. From this point of view, trade between the GDR and any of the EEC members did not constitute foreign trade. When the EEC

⁴⁹² Protocol about Intra-German Trade and Connected Issues, Paragraph 1, 25 March 1957.

⁴⁹³ Protocol about Intra-German Trade and Connected Issues, Paragraph 2, 25 March 1957.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., Paragraph 3. See also Kommission der Europäischen Gemeinschaften, “Handelsbeziehungen mit der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik,” (Mitteilung von der Kommission an den Rat) 18 April 1973, B102/180511, BAK.

⁴⁹⁵ Commentary on Protocol about Intra-German Trade and Connected Issues, B102/245206, BAK. [Emphasis in the original.] This special relationship is further explained in Dr. Schlebitz an AA, betr. Sonderbeschluss des Ministerrats zur gemeinsamen Handelspolitik betreffend Staatshandelsländer; Behandlung der SBZ in diesem Beschluss, 21 August 1961, B102/245206, BAK.

Council of Ministers attempted to include EEC-GDR trade relations under Article 111 of the Rome Treaty that regulated foreign trade in 1961, the Federal Republic demanded a clause exempting it from all of the council's decisions vis-à-vis the GDR.⁴⁹⁶ Time and again, Bonn prioritized the wellbeing of German-German relations over European agreements, affirming the political nature of intra-German trade.

Not surprisingly, one of the first foreign trade disagreements in the EEC came about in relations to the Eastern Bloc and European trade credits. The Berne Union had implemented the limit of state-backed credit to five years with a gentleman's agreement between western countries to create fair trading conditions across the Iron Curtain.⁴⁹⁷ In accord with western containment policy, this agreement strove to prevent the Soviet-led bloc from playing western trade partners against one other for political or financial gains. Together with the United States, the FRG had been timid about overstepping the Berne Union rules, admittedly because in its special geographic situation, West Germany already consistently ranked first in trade statistics with the Eastern Bloc in general and the GDR specifically (see table 8).⁴⁹⁸ By 1964, a number of western countries, among them Japan, the UK, Italy, and France, broke the Berne agreement and granted the East European socialist countries credits ranging from seven to fifteen years. Worried about keeping its prominent status in the "Eastern trade" (*Osthandel*), the Federal Republic started an initiative to streamline EEC foreign trade policy regarding the East. The Federal Ministry of Economics stated explicitly that "intra-zonal trade is an instrument of

⁴⁹⁶ Dr. Schlebitz to AA, betr. Sonderbeschluss des Ministerrats zur gemeinsamen Handelspolitik betreffend Staatshandelsländer; Behandlung der SBZ in diesem Beschluss, 21 August 1961, B102/245206, BAK.

⁴⁹⁷ Ostausschuss der deutschen Wirtschaft, Entschliessung betr. längerfristige Kreditgewährung an die Staatshandelsländer des Ostens, 1 December 1964, B102/180605, BAK.

⁴⁹⁸ Attachment, Ost-Ausschuss der deutschen Wirtschaft, Memorandum betr. Frage der Kreditgewährung bei Investitionsgüter-Lieferungen an Ostblockstaaten, 1 December 1964, B102/180605, BAK.

reunification policy,” thus emphasizing the special nature of the German-German relationship.⁴⁹⁹ While Bonn felt no need to justify its special interest in these trade relations, the government feared that the GDR could find favorable financial support elsewhere, thus jeopardizing the carefully crafted dependencies and interconnections between the two German economies. In conference with other EEC members, West Germany put two options on the table that would apply to all members: granting a seven-year liquidation limit or upholding the Berne Union agreement. By creating unity among the EEC members, Bonn attempted to shape Europe’s global trade policies in protection of its own special relationship to East Berlin.⁵⁰⁰ However, Italy preferred to debate these matters immediately in the Berne Union or the OECD in order to come to a binding agreement for all western nations. The archival documentation of German involvement in the question of western state-backed credits ends here and it is therefore plausible to assume that these matters continued to be discussed in one of the two other organizations.⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁹ Dr. Heise, betr.: Grosse Anfrage der Abgeordneten Freiherr von Kühlmann-Stumm und Gen. betr. EWG Politik, 10 June 1966, B102/180605, BAK.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ Sach (BMWi), Fernschreiben 188. Tagung des EWG-Ministerrats am 13./14.6.66, 15 June 1966, B102/180605, BAK.

	Exports/Deliveries to the GDR					Imports/ Deliveries from the GDR				
Country	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965
Belgium/ Luxemburg	11.52	13.68	14.28	8.76	11.88	14.16	16.92	19.68	22.92	26.36
Denmark	12.36	21.84	14.40	18.36	24.60	15.84	16.32	17.04	20.76	23.88
France	21.48	15.96	18.12	26.28	69.00!	8.4	8.52	12.60	14.28	15.96
Greece	6.48	4.56	4.92	6.57	9.50	2.64	3.96	4.80	6.11	8.42
Iceland	0.96	0.72	0.96	0.36	1.68	1.92	1.68	1.20	2.40	2.88
Italy	10.80	7.92	12.96	13.32	16.08	14.28	11.52	12.36	14.88	14.16
Netherlands	16.08	9.24	12.12	15.60	19.92	17.2	17.64	23.28	30.24	32.76
Norway	6.0	6.12	7.32	15.96	10.08	8.40	7.68	6.00	9.84	11.88
Portugal	0.36	0.36	0.48	0.48	0.60	0.24	0.24	0.24	1.56	0.36
Turkey	4.68	1.32	5.64	4.92	9.24	6.12	4.32	5.76	8.16	9.36
Great Britain	27.48	27.00	22.44	17.04	23.16	18.72	18.48	21.12	29.04	33.60
NATO Europe (w/o FRG)	118.2 0	108.7 2	113.6 4	127.6 5	195.7 4	108.2 4	107.3 4	124.0 8	160.1 9	179.6 2
Canada	1.56	0.12	1.20	10.92	14.04	0.96	0.84	1.08	1.37	1.44
USA	2.76	1.68	6.36	19.92	12.60	2.52	3.00	3.24	6.72	6.48
FRG (intra- zonal)	216.7 5	213.5 3	214.8 9	287.1 3	297.7 8	235.6 2	228.6 2	255.5 8	257.1 1	315.6 9
NATO total	339.2 7	324.0 5	336.0 9	445.6 2	520.1 6	347.3 4	339.8 0	383.9 8	425.3 9	503.2 3

Table 8: Trade Results between NATO States and the GDR (in Million US \$).⁵⁰²

While Bonn protected its political goals regarding intra-German trade against rivaling European interests, the East German economy greatly profited from integration into the European market. In 1970 an inter-German public exchange about how the GDR benefited from West Germany's economic cooperation with France, the Benelux countries, and Italy created disharmony between usually amicable trading partners. The Federal Minister for Intra-German Relations Egon Franke estimated publicly that the GDR earned 400 to 500 million DM per year because of its economic relationship to West Germany.⁵⁰³ By trading with Western Europe through West German middlemen, the GDR enjoyed the same tariff conditions as EEC members after internal tariffs were

⁵⁰² Results of Trade between NATO states and the GDR (in Mio US \$), B102/245208, BAK [exclamation point marking the 1965 jump in France's trade with GDR in original].

⁵⁰³ Mitteilung des Ministerrats der DDR, "Zu den Außenwirtschaftsbeziehungen der DDR mit der BRD," 3 June 1970, DF5/5041, BAB.

abolished in 1968. With Franke's official statement, the Federal Republic hinted at the GDR's dependence on West Germany for economic prosperity. Moreover, his remarks suggested that it would be prudent for East Germany to stop pushing for recognition under international law. In this way, European integration not only shaped economic relations between East and West Germany, but also influenced debates on the German Question in the early 1970s.

Not surprisingly, the depiction of East German economic growth as an outcome of West German European integration politics offended the GDR government. In a public note, the Council of Ministers defended the socialist economy against the "capitalist imperialism" of the Federal Republic by pointing to its trade relations with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.⁵⁰⁴ Indeed, the Soviet Union was East Germany's biggest trade partner. However, it should be stressed that commodities within the scope of the eastern bloc's Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) exchanged exclusively for kind, not money. In the COMECON's exchange system, just like in the intra-German trade, every product was assigned accounting units. Accordingly, no hard currency found its way into the GDR via trade in the COMECON. For foreign currency, East Germany had to depend on credits and trade with the West.

Just like Minister Franke had foreseen, the Eastern Treaties (*Ostverträge*) of the Federal Republic with the Soviet Union, Poland, and the GDR threatened East Germany's special status in the EEC statutes. The question of a unified EEC eastern trade policy resurfaced in 1970 immediately with the signing of the Moscow and Warsaw treaties. The EEC thought that if the Soviet Bloc recognized European cooperation not

⁵⁰⁴ Mitteilung des Ministerrats der DDR, "Zu den Außenwirtschaftsbeziehungen der DDR mit der BRD," 3 June 1970, DF5/5041, BAB.

only *de facto* but also *de jure*, a more cohesive and effective European economic policy would be viable, which could possibly contribute to the EEC's extension to other Western European countries. With the East-West détente and the GDR's international recognition on the horizon, West Germany's EEC partners wanted to renegotiate the status of intra-German trade.⁵⁰⁵ Once the Basic Treaty was signed in 1972, the other member states grew increasingly impatient with the special status of intra-German trade. Pushing for the abolition of the "Protocol on intra-German trade," the EEC acknowledged the new political reality of two German states. West Germany meanwhile maintained that the Basic Treaty had not deepened the German-German division any further. The question of German unification remained open, Bonn argued, because the two German states still considered each other foreign territory (*Ausland*) and thus intra-German trade would remain an important bond between them.⁵⁰⁶ In order to ease European concerns, however, Bonn pointed to trade statistics: the percentage of intra-German trade in contrast to West German EEC trade was small; the trade between the EEC partners and the GDR had decisively increased in recent years; intra-German trade was unlikely to grow because of the GDR's problems to deliver; and the ruinous danger of GDR price-dumping practices was negligible for the Common Market, since East Berlin kept prices high to reap larger profits.⁵⁰⁷ Accordingly, from the West German

⁵⁰⁵ Brüssel Eurogerma to BMWi u.a., betr Bundesausserminister beim EP am 16.9.1970, 18 September 1970, B102/301093, BAK.

⁵⁰⁶ Memo, Einleitende Aufzeichnung für die Sitzung der Staatssekretäre für Europafragen am 21. Februar 1973, 16. Februar 1973, B 102/180511, BAK. See also Kommission der Europäischen Gemeinschaften, "Handelsbeziehungen mit der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik," (Mitteilung von der Kommission an den Rat) 18 April 1973, B102/180511, BAK.

⁵⁰⁷ Memo, Einleitende Aufzeichnung für die Sitzung der Staatssekretäre für Europafragen am 21.2.1973, 16 February 1973, B 102/180511, BAK.

point of view, there existed no reason to nullify the protocol. Then again, the advent of Honecker's consumer turn changed the course of intra-German trade.

As the earlier discussion of German-German trade has shown, trade between East and West Germany grew exponentially after Honecker's accession to power in 1971. As a parallel development, EEC skepticism about the stoical West German claim to a special relationship between Bonn and East Berlin grew. In 1974, Belgium demanded that the community implement instruments to monitor intra-German trade.⁵⁰⁸ The same year, the Netherlands complained that the Federal Republic interrupted the free-trade zone, stopping imports of GDR products sent through other EEC countries into West Germany.⁵⁰⁹ Bonn reacted strongly, insisting on upholding the regulations of paragraph 1 of the protocol on intra-German trade. The FRG justified this stance with the continued political interest of keeping German-German economic exchanges direct and as frequent as possible in order to thicken contacts between East and West.⁵¹⁰ When bilateral negotiations failed to produce agreement, the Benelux countries began a grievance procedure in accordance with paragraph 3 of the protocol on intra-German trade, which allowed states to take measures if the trade of a member state with East Berlin hurt their interests.

While the Benelux countries rightfully questioned Bonn's loyalties for the way it handled intra-German trade, the real bone of contention was the tariff exemption for East

⁵⁰⁸ Dr. Schreiber (BMWi) Vermerk betr. Sitzung der Gruppe Handelsfragen des Rates am 19. November 1974 in Brüssel, 21 November 1974, B102/180512, BAK; Fernschreiben aus Brüssel an AA, betr. EWG-DDR, 20 November 1974, B102/180512, BAK.

⁵⁰⁹ Dr. v. Arnim (BMWi), Vermerk betr.: Verhältnis EWG-DDR Hier: Niederländische Beschwerde über Abschirmung des Marktes der Bundesrepublik gegenüber in die Niederlande aus der DDR eingeführte Waren, 2 December 1974, B102/180512, BAK.

⁵¹⁰ Meeting with Benelux-Delegation (Erläuterungen unserer Delegation), February 1975, B102/180512, BAK.

German products. The European Court of Justice had declared these to be products “not of German origin” for the purpose of EEC trade policies after the GDR’s formal recognition by EEC members had made it a “third country.”⁵¹¹ Due to the special nature of intra-German trade the GDR paid no tariffs for crossing the border into the Federal Republic.⁵¹² Once inside the EEC zone East German goods could continue to move around the EEC without further taxation, skewing the principles of the Common Market and hurting national industries as well as dealership networks. Consequently, the West German position that connected the German Question to intra-German trade came under close scrutiny by the EEC. The Benelux furthermore hinted at the FRG’s economic profiteering from inter-German trade as a transit layover for distribution of Eastern products. Because of the tax exemption and established dealership networks, West Germany could sell East German goods to other member states with higher margins. As the system of intra-German trade was rooted in product bartering tied to exclusive credit agreements, the method necessarily conflicted with the free trade of the Common Market.⁵¹³ Had the products entered the Common Market under the usual tariff laws through other EEC member states, they would not have enjoyed this competitive advantage. In order to avoid legal action while guaranteeing the uninterrupted political priority of intra-German trade, the Federal Republic proposed a compromise: a license agreement that allowed for 10 million DM worth of GDR products to be brought into

⁵¹¹ The EEC countries signed trade agreements for 10 years with the GDR in the aftermath of the Basic Treaty. Commission des Communautés Europeennes, *Accord de Cooperation bilatéraux entre des Etats Membres et la RDA* signed by France on 19 July 1973, England 18 December 1973, Italy 18 April 1973, Belgium/Luxemburg 31 August 1974, Netherlands 12 June 1974, Denmark 21 February 1974.

⁵¹² Dr. Groß, Vermerk betr. Freiverkehrsfähigkeit von im innerdeutschen Handel bezogenen Waren, 11 April 1975, B102/180512, BAK.

⁵¹³ Dr. v. Arnim (BMW), Vermerk betr.: Verhältnis EWG-DDR Hier: Niederländische Beschwerde über Abschirmung des Marktes der Bundesrepublik gegenüber in die Niederlande aus der DDR eingeführte Waren, 2. December 1974, B102/180512, BAK.

West Germany through other EEC countries. This proposal represented a maximum amount that, so Bonn hoped, would neither enable East Berlin to supply West German demand exclusively through third countries, nor possibly create a political lever for the GDR.⁵¹⁴ At the same time, the national dealership networks of its European partners would get a piece of the pie and acquire leeway that they desired in trading with the GDR.

Despite the risk of disagreement in the EEC, the Federal Republic upheld intra-German trade as a policy toward unification. This rapprochement policy triggered widespread domestic critique from liberal and conservative quarters. In a public hearing before the parliament in 1977, sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf described the lack of clarity in Bonn's *Deutschlandpolitik* in combination with European integration as "explosive."⁵¹⁵ Active pursuit of European political unity would necessarily preclude German unification, Dahrendorf maintained, because none of West Germany's neighbors had a strong political or economic interest in seeing Germany reunite. Political scientist Hans-Peter Schwarz criticized the policy of rapprochement, noting that the Basic Treaty had taken the German Question out of the East-West conflict and German policies had fallen by the wayside.⁵¹⁶ Yet the analysis of intra-German trade in relation to the EEC integration shows the political power and economic significance of the unresolved German Question, which lasted well beyond the Basic Treaty. Looking at the cultural effects triggered by EEC trade policy, the FRG under the leadership of the Social

⁵¹⁴ Meeting with Benelux-Delegation, Erläuterungen unserer Delegation, February 1975, B102/180512, BAK. This was twice the amount of GDR goods that had entered the Benelux via the FRG in the previous year.

⁵¹⁵ Public Hearing, Sachverständige zur Deutschlandpolitik, 11 October 1977, B288/75, BAK.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

Democrats achieved its goal of deepened German-German economic and cultural ties precisely because of European integration. Through the circulation of East and West German goods in the EEC, both product cultures interacted on the same market.

Aesthetic Convergence in the Common Market

The integration of the EEC increased the interaction of East and West German import and export economies through the loophole of intra-German trade, permeating the Iron Curtain with capitalist market principles and Western aesthetic styles. West German stubbornness thus not only worked to uphold bonds between Germans, but also contributed to a convergence of aesthetics between East Germany, the Federal Republic, and EEC countries. Although both German states had developed strong notions of their own national identity in design during the reconstruction years, other countries' styles and tastes affected German material culture in turn with growing trade.

In the GDR, the aesthetic incentives of the Common Market worked mostly through export goods production, slowly undermining socialist material ideals. To the East German office for quality control, the DAMW, the fact that exports to the West increasingly determined the appearance of commodities in East Germany was even more disturbing than the obvious gap between the claims and the realities of its production. East Germany's inflexible planning mechanisms made the production of export furniture and domestic design inseparable. Once set on a furniture model, the regional industry structured the distribution of raw materials and ordered the machines needed to realize only these designs. Changing the design meant a halt in production until the supply sector responded and the necessary technological changes were made. This crippled innovation

to the degree that industry reports after 1970 regularly included remarks on the old-fashioned look of GDR furniture.⁵¹⁷ While these products should not have been awarded the official seal of quality – a measure that the DAMW and the Central Institute used to encourage “socialist” design – they made exceptions for poorly designed furniture in the export business. The DAMW’s realistic assessment that earning foreign currency was more important “because we cannot force our design principles on the foreign buyer” exemplifies how economic necessities suppressed socialist fervor, designers’ creativity, and innovation.⁵¹⁸

The furniture at the 1970 Leipzig Fair, in particular, failed to live up to the DAMW’s expectations: “The requirements of a socialist living culture cannot be met with these [export] models.”⁵¹⁹ While the East German upholstery section at the Leipzig fair did display joy of experimentation (*Experimentierfreudigkeit*), it was often a result of foreign, that is to say Western European, customers’ requests.⁵²⁰ Indeed, archival evidence suggests that the GDR actively pursued Western European customers. For example, by the 1960s the Zentralinstitut had sent its staff to trade fairs in the West to report on the technological quality and design of the capitalist competition.⁵²¹ The new travel agreements of the Basic Treaty facilitated the task of the Zentralinstitut in this regard. Short trips to West Berlin to visit exhibitions at the newly opened International Design Center or to view the range of products at West German furniture stores increased tremendously after 1972. Most of the documented visits to the Cologne International

⁵¹⁷ See for example Dr. Lindenhayn (DAMW) to Köppen (chair of the economic council Neubrandenburg), 4 June 1971, DF5/5082, BAB.

⁵¹⁸ Dr. Lindenhayn (DAMW) to Köppen (chair of the economic council Neubrandenburg), 4 June 1971, DF5/5082, BAB.

⁵¹⁹ DAMW fair report, Leipziger Herbstmesse 1970, 4 September 1970, DF5/5041, BAB.

⁵²⁰ Ibid.

⁵²¹ Travel reports, 11764/1897, SStD.

Furniture Fair fall into this time period as well. Ironically, this observational activity entailed a certain degree of adaptation to Western aesthetics. In 1974, the Bavarian Upholstery Association accused East German combines of “slavishly” imitating West German designs and selling their furniture at cut-rate prices.⁵²² West German producers feared the eastern economic competition on the European market. The FRG government, however, saw this transfer of cultural ideas as a way to impress Western aesthetics upon the East German population and thereby to propagate the principles of capitalist democracy.

Indeed, the Zentralinstitut’s successor, the Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung, started a product card index in 1974, in which it cataloged furniture systems predominately from Scandinavia, the Federal Republic, Switzerland, and Italy, with an occasional Russian model thrown in to inspire the export models that headed east.⁵²³ The western firms in the card index were extreme examples of classy, high-priced designer furniture like Interlübke – nothing one would expect in a workers and peasants’ state. In the process of cataloging the West’s furniture, GDR industrial designers compared their products with those of the West, which, ultimately, hindered the development of a distinct East German aesthetic. The tendency towards comparison stood in stark contrast to the GDR’s cultural-economic goal of convincing the West of the East’s superior quality and comfort of life. The GDR intelligentsia incorporated this Westernization of style into the socialist framework of the state without hesitation. Cultural critic Karin Hirdina hurried to make the form fit the ideology in 1975:

⁵²² Weinbeer to Hans Friedrichs, Betr.: Beschäftigungslage in der Polstermöbelindustrie – Wettbewerbsverzerrung durch DDR-Billigimporte, 9 August 1976, B102/206958, BAK.

⁵²³ Product index, Produktkartei Wohnraummöbel, DF7/534, 535, 536, 537, 538, BAB; Produktkartei Sitzmöbel, DF7/509, 510, 511, 512, 514, 515, 516, 517, 518, BAB.

In fact, defined as a program and a method, not as a style, functionalism represents a Utopian vision of a non-capitalist order of relationships between Man and his environment. Strictly speaking functionalism does not work in the capitalist system. It does not affirm capitalism, it transcends it.⁵²⁴

But all too often the natural look of Sweden, the functionalist purism of West Germany and Switzerland, and the playful avant-gardism of Italy meshed together in the cheap export furniture offered in West German mail-order catalogs.

Nevertheless, modeling production after popular western brands still seemed like the most promising strategy to East German economists. To gauge the Western markets, not only the Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung, but also the larger combines sent their research and development staff to Western trade shows. In 1979, Dresden-Hellerau, for example, visited both the International Furniture Fair in Cologne and the International Furniture Salon in Paris.⁵²⁵ Aside from neo-functionalism, the designs, especially in France, displayed a strong tendency toward ornamentation, while homeliness and comfort dominated in Cologne. The GDR with its style specialists in Zeulenroda and other combines around the country could easily design such items. Yet, the most important lesson learned from these visits in the West pertained to materials rather than design. Upon his return, Gert Großpietzsch, the head of Hellerau's research and development, recommended in a report that the combine should produce expensive furniture to maximize its revenues and to target the unexplored parts of the western market.⁵²⁶ In

⁵²⁴ Karin Hirdina quoted in Georg Bertsch, Ernst Hedler, and Matthias Dietz, *SED – Schönes Einheits Design* (Cologne: Taschen Verlag, 1994), 28. This quote originates with a 1975 issue of the East German design journal *Form und Zweck*.

⁵²⁵ Christine Guntscheff (Export Department of VVB Möbel Dresden), Teilreisebericht über die Teilnahme am 10. Internationalen Möbelsalon Paris vom 11. – 15.1.1979, 23 January 1979, 11764/1897, SSStD; Gert Großpietzsch (Head of Research and Development Hellerau), Teil-Reisebericht vom Besuch der Deutschen Möbelmesse Köln 1979, n.d., 11764/1897, SSStD.

⁵²⁶ Gert Großpietzsch (Head of Research and Development Hellerau), Teil-Reisebericht vom Besuch der Deutschen Möbelmesse Köln 1979, n.d., pg. 9, 11764/1897, SSStD.

terms of materials, he reported, the trend went back to the natural with a high demand for solid woods and wooden veneers, the exact materials that the Chemical Program had abolished. Instead, the East German synthetic alternative to veneers, so-called decorative foil, which went through multiple varnishing and polishing processes after its application on chipboard, compromised the overall aesthetic.⁵²⁷ With the shortfall of Honecker's Unity of Economic and Social Policy program, the material dreams of Großpietzsch and his designer colleagues remained out of reach, leaving East Germany to continue its low-end quality production strategy. By 1985, about 8 percent of the Federal Republic's furniture imports came from the GDR.⁵²⁸ The combines mass-produced contracted furniture for western clients with different stylistic demands ranging from neo-functionalism for Ikea to style-furniture for enthusiastic retailers.⁵²⁹

In the West German case, trade and a nascent collective vision of Europe as a cultural space worked European trends into West German designs. The Federal Republic's accession to the status of the world's largest furniture exporter, grossing three billion DM in 1981, developed parallel to an equally high import of foreign-made furniture.⁵³⁰ Consequently, domestic producers followed the lead of the European market demand in order to maximize sales. Foreign influences thus found their way into the department stores and homes of the Federal Republic, slowly affecting the overall national aesthetic. While consumption shaped and reproduced dominant ideas about the

⁵²⁷ The author saw a number of modern storage furniture from the 1970s and 1980s at the Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR in Eisenhüttenstadt. Close up, despite the neo-functionalist design, the *Schrankwände* looked cheap because of the decorative foil technique and the poor construction.

⁵²⁸ Lauber, *Wohnkultur in der DDR*, 42.

⁵²⁹ "Fachbericht zur Dienstreise vom 02.12. bis 05.12.1985 zur Firma RKL-I, Firma Lübke und Messeleitung Köln," 7 December 1985, 11764/2390, SSStD; VE MK Dresden-Hellerau to VEB DW Hellerau, "Reklamationseinsatz Gen. Krebs bei Fa. IKEA," 28 May 1986, 11764/2390, SSStD.

⁵³⁰ Memo, Niederschrift über die Arbeitstagung Holz, Zellstoff, Papier und Druck am 13. November 1980 in Bonn, 15 January 1981, B102/285299, BAK.

appearance of material culture, artistic influences brought new ideas into the Common Market. The Federal Republic's domination of the international furniture market coincided with the "designer decade" of the 1980s, which brought the aesthetic value of material culture back to the forefront.⁵³¹ Cultural events, such as the Venice Biennale of 1980, greatly impacted industrial furniture design again and in a magnitude that had last been seen in 1958 at the Brussels world exposition. The Venice Biennale marked the arrival of postmodernism in Europe. Although postmodernism focused on architecture, most of its participants were engaged in interior design as well. Debates resulting from this epochal event thus extended beyond the sphere of architecture into the field of applied arts. Through the mushrooming of lifestyle design stores, in particular, design entered back into public discourse on consumption. Moreover, design infiltrated all areas of public and private life via collaborations of traditional brands, such as Alessi or WMF, with the most creative minds that the applied arts had to offer.⁵³²

A radical design movement from Italy illustrates the playfulness of this postmodern decade and its implications for West German furniture design.⁵³³ Inspired by Art Deco and Pop Art, the virtuoso movement Memphis (1981) entered the design scene under the leadership of Ettore Sottsass, who achieved an alienation of products through the deconstruction of silhouettes. While the extreme shapes did not meet enthusiasm among the population because of their limited functionality, their influence is still visible in German museums to this day. Wolfgang Flatz' lightning chair and table (1982),

⁵³¹ Aynsley, *Designing Modern Germany*, 204.

⁵³² The Italian company Alessi exemplifies this turn to "designer wares." In the early 1980s, the company collaborated with designers, turning everyday utility objects into design objects that henceforth shaped the landscape of European interiors.

⁵³³ For a detailed discussion of Italian influences in German furniture design of the 1980s see Gert Selle, *Geschichte des Design in Deutschland*, exp. ed. (Frankfurt: Campus, 2007), 267-272 and Aynsley, *Designing Modern Germany*, 202-207.

displayed in Hamburg's Kunstgewerbemuseum, drew inspiration from the movement (see figure 11). Furniture mass production referenced these exaggerated shapes, for example emulating urban skylines in top pieces of wardrobes and shelves. Especially in West Germany, this playful movement broke down into geometric forms that are well exemplified by Peter Maly's Zyklus furniture (1984), pieces that have become German classics (see figures 12 and 13). In the GDR, similar shapes emerged with Herbert Pohl's Metropol furniture (1986) for the East Berlin furniture combine, which the Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung approved and recognized with the prize "Gutes Design" at the Leipzig fair in 1988 (see figures 14, 15 and 16). Unfortunately, the Metropol program never entered mass production, because the GDR collapsed before the model could be integrated into the next Plan.⁵³⁴ Nevertheless, opening up to European influences further increased similarities between the two German states as well as between them and the rest of Western Europe (see figure 17).

Germany's own take on postmodernism drew pronouncedly on historical elements.⁵³⁵ Rather than following the experimental path of deconstruction, Germans in East and West rehabilitated urban apartment buildings dating back to the nineteenth century. The rediscovery of the classic architecture of an aesthetically untainted German

⁵³⁴ Herbert Pohl (architect and designer) in discussion with the author in Berlin on 13 January 2009. Design historian Gert Selle claims that the playful, Italian-influenced furniture style did not exist in the GDR. However, Pohl's designs were no singular phenomenon. Pohl worked with an entire team of designers and architects who created similarly experimental furniture that did not comply with former style ideals, such as production-minded functionalist furniture or decorative furniture with mass appeal. Selle, *Geschichte des Designs in Deutschland*, 270.

⁵³⁵ The reluctance to use the term "postmodern" in German illustrates this interpretation of postmodernism as a return to the past. The title of Jean-François Lyotard's epoch defining work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979) was translated into "The Presence of the Past" in both Italian and German. Design historian Aynsley has shown how these translation questions started a debate about "the 'return' to history" in architecture and design with significant implications for European countries. Aynsley, *Designing Modern Germany*, 202.

past came alongside a postmodernist critique that aimed at the core of postwar German national design. In this rejection of modern aesthetics, which encompassed the Werkbund, the Bauhaus, Ulm, and the late functionalism of large-scale housing programs and city transportation systems, the strong sense of continuity that they represented came under attack again.⁵³⁶ Such critique of functionalist modernism affected German furniture designers as well. In 1982, an East German report from the Cologne fair explained that the Spartan aesthetics and rigid lines of West German functionalism had been overcome in the West. Instead, “lines of emphasized elegance with a tendency to individualism” attracted the consumer.⁵³⁷ Successful West German furniture producers such as Interlübke and Hülsta recovered elements that evoked the mass appeal of Art Nouveau (see figure 18). Within Europe, this furniture style was historically one of the most successful aesthetic concepts that straddled the divide between crafts and mass production. Its many international names alone indicate the vibrancy of style in the fields of architecture, art, and decorative arts as well as the scope of its circulation: Jugendstil, Stile Liberty, le style moderne, arte nova, arte joven, and Nieuwe Kunst to name but a few. The return to historical styles, as shown earlier in regard to GDR Socialist Realism, did not constitute a novelty. It rather brought the postmodernist and the style enthusiast in Germany closer together while creating bridges to the French and Italian cultures that prefer opulence to asceticism. In the process of European economic integration, then, awareness of a European culture and identity began to emerge.

⁵³⁶ Aynsley, *Designing Modern Germany*, 205-206.

⁵³⁷ Gerhard Wetzig, Dienstreisebericht Möbelmesse Köln 19.1. - 22.1.1982, 1 February 1982, DF 7/1072, BAB.

For the first time in its comparatively short history, the EEC awarded an industrial design prize in 1988. The award recognized small and medium-sized industrial firms that excelled in the categories of quality design and corporate identity. This prize illustrated, first, that design had become by the late 1980s a critical factor for the success of European products of *Mittelstand* businesses that continue to constitute the backbone of European national economies today. The design prize marked, second, the culmination of cultural-economic competition for markets within the European Community that encouraged the acceptance of other national aesthetic concepts. In the call for submissions to the 1988 EEC design prize, organizers underscored the pan-European nature of this event. In particular, the competition's three objectives emphasized the concept of a shared European design culture: (1) To stimulate interest in design in European/EEC industries; (2) To illustrate the nature of the design process and how it can be used as a tool for industrial innovation; and (3) To promote European/EEC design outside of Europe.⁵³⁸

The 1980s were a turning point in the effort to forge a European cultural space. As plans for a cultural TV event illustrate, industrial design served as a building block for European identity. The pan-European project “La Casa Europea – European Design Day on European TV” aired on the same day in all EC member countries. This connected and coordinated program about European design consisted of different elements like discussions, lectures about objects, interviews, and design presentations. Several of the goals for this event listed by the organizers pushed for a cohesive European aesthetic that communicated the “growing together” of the Western European countries. Among other

⁵³⁸ Danish Design Council to Jörg Bieberstein (BMW), The European Design Prize, 23 February 1987, B457/8, BAK; Statutes for the European/EEC Design Prize, 21 February 1987, B457/8, BAK.

things, they used the event to promote the “idea and the reality of European design, to demonstrate the essential quality of design for European development, to inform about the innovative perspective of design for Europe, and to offer design as a European identity.”⁵³⁹ Aiming to prove to a European audience that Europe had grown into a tight-knit network of different European locations and activities, exemplified by the telecommunication that this event utilized, the TV program proposed Europe as an open space. Industrial design helped to create this European public sphere, serving as a framework for European innovation to explain “Europe as a real and artificial world.”⁵⁴⁰ This conception of Europe as a cultural space and its integrative force even brought about deliberations for a communal EC cultural policy vis-à-vis the GDR.⁵⁴¹

Yet not everybody shared the excitement about European design. In 1989, the West German Rat für Formgebung restructured itself under new leadership. Dieter Rams, a design personality known as the mind behind the rebranding of Braun and its evolution into one of the leading technological design companies worldwide, volunteered as president of the orphaned and disheveled design council. In an effort to bring the Rat to its rightful place at the core of West German industrial design policy and to fight off regional competition from the Chambers of Commerce, he started a fundraising campaign among industrialists and entrepreneurs. In a letter asking for financial support, Rams pointed to other countries’ design activities and the integration of the European market as a motivation to reorganize the design policy of the Federal Republic in defense of the

⁵³⁹ Project conception, “La Casa Europea – European Design Day on European TV, Anhang zum summary of the meeting of the expert-group ‘La CASA Europea’ day in Luxembourg am 18.12.1989, n.d., B457/150, BAK.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Ambassador Juan J. Rubio de Urquía, “Culture in the GDR: Possibilities of EC Cultural Activities in the GDR,” 2 March 1989, pg. 8, B288/256, BAK.

West German brand. The goal was to heighten awareness for German design by increasing its presence abroad, thus giving German design its rightful recognition as an important export factor.⁵⁴² Rams intended to continue the Rat's thrust for a national identity predicated on its industrial design, however, these activities, while not unfounded, already seemed outdated at the time. The Federal Republic's long-term policymaking in the European Community was based on continuous growth, both in the breadth and the depth of the union. For the inclusion of new member states and the aggregation of supranational powers, the EEC needed popular support. One way to create that support was indeed cultural Europeanization toward a European identity. Since the EEC had started out as a purely economic cooperation, it seemed only natural that these cultural bonds would be forged in a field that straddles the economic and the cultural: industrial design.

Conclusion

Friedrich Koslowsky never built his "House of Life." But his vision to erect cultural bridges via product exchange materialized through the integrative forces of intra-German trade and the European Common Market. The combination of diplomatic and economic politics with the interests of the Federal Republic at its core initiated a process of Europeanization that reached well beyond the Iron Curtain.

Trade fairs functioned as early testing grounds for German-German economic and cultural contacts, which grew over the course of the 1960s and boomed in the 1970s. Despite non-recognition of the GDR, the FRG traded with the East and continued the

⁵⁴² Dieter Rams to MAHO AG, 7 September 1989, B457/129.

pretense that economic exchanges did not imply *de facto* political recognition. Meanwhile the GDR aligned itself through trade with the fortunes of capitalist economies. The GDR utilized intra-German trade to increase exports and to yield more foreign currency. In order to establish and survive in an international market, the East German production aesthetic converged with Western ones. The malfunctioning parts of economic planning increasingly sabotaged any internal aesthetic policies as the export orientation of the furniture industry worked against delineation from the West.⁵⁴³ Meanwhile, the Federal Republic profited politically from product scarcity in the GDR. Exhibiting progress and abundance at the fair and through trade, Bonn promoted the capitalist lifestyles and created demand for western product aesthetics among the East German population. Although the economic payoff for West Germany was negligible, the federal government had a continued interest in the East-West dialog to maintain ties between the two German states, even risking disagreement with other EEC members. The story that unfolds in this chapter suggests that only after the resolution of the German Question could the Federal Republic fully commit to Europe.

Yet this is not to say that the EEC was of no significance to the German-German rapprochement process. Quite the opposite is the case. European economic integration and cultural European trends paved the way for a cultural convergence between East and West Germany. The initial moments of German aesthetic convergence towards a European design can be found in the integration of the Common Market and the incentives it gave to pursue “European” tastes and styles, no matter how diverse. This study has examined this process in the realm of the furniture industry and industrial

⁵⁴³ See Sleifer, *Planning Ahead and Falling Behind* for a comparative analysis of East Germany’s command economy.

design; however, there are probably other areas in which this phenomenon can be observed. Early attempts at establishing an “East” or a “West” design aesthetic gave way to aesthetics based on market incentives to compete in the expanding trade of lifestyle consumption during the 1970s and 1980s. What is remarkable, given the Cold War context, is the fact that neither Germany’s furniture production directly imitated or culturally identified with the United States or the Soviet Union. Instead, each drew on the creative strength of their immediate European neighbors, a process that was accelerated by the integration of the European Community.

CHAPTER 5: BETWEEN COMPETITION AND COOPERATION: COLD WAR DIPLOMACY OF GERMAN DESIGN

Introduction

German-German relations during the Cold War represented a piecemeal effort to “coexist” in a geopolitical situation marked by rising superpower tensions. Both Germanys fiercely competed for legitimacy and recognition in the international arena.⁵⁴⁴ Faced with deadlocked ideological positions, Germans eventually realized that they needed new avenues of interaction in order to salvage what was left of social, cultural, and economic (not to mention familial) bonds between the two Germanys. The following chapter explores East and West German cultural-diplomatic strategies that sought to negotiate a German-German *modus vivendi* through the medium of industrial design and connects these efforts to the complex diplomatic history of the Cold War.

Part of what allowed material culture to mediate German-German relations was the deeply ingrained self-understanding of Germany as a “nation of culture” (*Kulturnation*) that survived the division. Both sides utilized aesthetics to overcome the horrors of the Third Reich and to display moral improvement. This operational understanding of aesthetics was the (least) common denominator upon which communication between the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic functioned. While both Germanys shared one cultural heritage with the illustrious names of Schiller and Goethe, Beethoven and Wagner, Albrecht Dürer and Caspar David Friedrich, the ideological Cold War shifted focus from “high culture” concerns to

⁵⁴⁴ In 1949, only 11 countries had recognized the GDR, and all of them were communist. William Glenn Gray summarizes GDR diplomacy as follows: “From the early 1950s through the late 1960s, the GDR labored to persuade even one noncommunist government to grant formal recognition. Such precedent would, it was hoped, generate an avalanche of further recognitions and result in a more general acceptance of the GDR as an independent state.” William Glenn Gray, *Germany’s Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949-1969* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 3.

questions of lifestyle and *Wohnkultur*. Intended to demonstrate the superiority of the respective economic systems, industrial design as an expression of material progress and membership among modern nations turned into a competitive field in the German-German struggle. Dating back to the turn-of-the-century arts and crafts movement, German design philosophy sought social improvement through aesthetic reform of the human environment, public as well as private. This tradition of aesthetic progress through material culture resonated with German politicians after the war.

The Federal Republic held an aesthetic advantage over its eastern neighbor. From the beginning West German design politicians pursued a modern style in interior design that they shared with other members of the Atlantic community. Its fresh and functional aesthetics placed West Germany among the advanced and progressive nations that held leadership in engineering, technology, and design. Meanwhile, the GDR aligned itself with the Soviet Union by adopting cultural Stalinism while also retaining strong German national influence. As interpretations of aesthetics and ideology changed more or less with every Secretary General of the Soviet Communist Party, however, East Germany slowly emancipated itself from the cultural wardship of its Big Brother. Impelled by the economic logic of export markets, discussed in the previous chapter, the GDR made great progress in the production of furniture that looked more contemporary and thus was able to find customers in East and West. Nevertheless, in comparison with the Federal Republic, by the late 1960s the GDR still did not belong to the leading nations in the development of human environments – the workplace, public spaces, and the home.

The story unfolding in this chapter is not just one of another Cold War race for superiority, although it takes place against the backdrop of inter-German competition. It

is also a story of rapprochement: while the East Germans employed culture as a soft-power means to promote humane aspects of socialist ideology with the goal of progressing from the status of a pariah state, West Germany used cultural diplomacy to foster human interactions between both German populations. Although their diplomatic goals differed, both Germanys used similar strategies that developed in three phases: 1) diplomacy within the framework of international design organizations, 2) international exhibitions of their respective industrial designs, and 3) direct German-German negotiations about cultural exchanges. In an effort to look at German postwar history from a cultural perspective, this study examines the actual cultural events resulting from political negotiations at each of these stages. The main actors of this chapter are trained designers or representatives of design organizations, who, in one way or another, engaged in cultural politics on behalf of their states. Accordingly, it follows their exhibition activities to uncover the political motivations inscribed in East and West German material culture.⁵⁴⁵

Within the context of the Cold War, the political significance of aesthetics in everyday objects has been well established.⁵⁴⁶ For example, historian Greg Castillo has analyzed the “soft power of mid-century design” to evaluate its influence on German design competition as a “culture battle” (“*Kulturkampf*”) between Americanization and

⁵⁴⁵ Heretofore unseen documents from the East German Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung and the West German Permanent Representation (*Ständige Vertretung*) in East Berlin provide new insights into the nature of German-German cultural competition and cooperation.

⁵⁴⁶ The political inscription of German commodities has been discussed by Paul Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects: A Cultural History of West German Industrial Design* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) and Eli Rubin, *Synthetic Socialism: Plastics and Dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008). The diplomatic use of American-style consumerism in the Cold War setting has been explored by Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through 20th-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005) and Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

Sovietization.⁵⁴⁷ By taking the focus off the superpowers to interrogate the specifically German cultural politics behind the aestheticization of separate identities – proletarian in the East and cosmopolitan in the West – I hope to provide a better picture of German interests in the global Cold War. The design history literature on Germany has not touched upon the topic of material culture’s operationalization for diplomatic purposes in the context of the German Question. If we take the significance of Berlin as the “frontline” of the Cold War and the “shop window” to the West seriously, German-German interaction around trade and cultural diplomacy warrants closer examination.

Encounters of Foreign Design: The Tug-of-War over ICSID Membership

On January 9, 1965, Mia Seeger, the *grande dame* of West German industrial design, received a strictly confidential letter from her Belgian colleague Josine des Cressonnières. The Secretary General of the International Council of Societies of Industrial Designers (ICSID) wanted to know if Seeger had heard of the Zentralinstitut für Gestaltung in Berlin and what she thought about its merits as a design institution. Des Cressonnières did not even know whether the Zentralinstitut, which had applied for ICSID membership, was in East or West Germany and depended on her German friend for an evaluation.⁵⁴⁸ This rather innocuous letter started a two-and-a-half-year-long West German campaign to prevent the GDR from joining the ICSID and to preserve West Germany’s membership as the sole representative of German interests in the international body.

⁵⁴⁷ Castillo, *Cold War at the Home Front*, xv.

⁵⁴⁸ Des Cressonnières to Mia Seeger, 9 January 1965, 10-11-1, DAB.

In the case of ICSID membership, however, the worlds of Cold War diplomacy and cultural politics collided.⁵⁴⁹ The campaign to isolate the GDR in the world of industrial design was in accord with the Federal Republic's diplomatic maxims regarding the eastern part of Germany: the Hallstein Doctrine, which prescribed the severing of diplomatic relations with countries that extended diplomatic recognition to the GDR, and the West German claim to exclusive representation (*Alleinvertretungsanspruch*) for all of Germany in international organizations. To influence third parties, West German diplomacy as well as East German countermeasures often utilized economic incentives and foreign aid packages.⁵⁵⁰ Similar issues were at hand here.

The ICSID had been created in 1957 as a purely professional organization dedicated to globally advance and organize the new field of industrial design.⁵⁵¹ Only professional associations, not nations themselves, were eligible for membership. A founding member, the Federal Republic of Germany acted as the sole representative of German interests. The organization quickly became the dominant international body in all things design, especially for Eurasia. Among the most important of the ICSID's tasks were the editorship of an international design bibliography and the organization of biannual design congresses. The West German Rat für Formgebung began editing the international bibliography in 1961. These efforts overlapped with a longstanding program

⁵⁴⁹ The ambiguous concept of cultural politics, emerging from the field of cultural studies, has been defined by Peter Jackson as "the view that 'cultural' questions of aesthetics, taste and style cannot be divorced from 'political' questions about power, inequality and oppression. Conversely, the concept refers to the way that contemporary politics haven been 'aestheticized', with a whole range of new issues apparently replacing traditional class-based ones: issues around gender and sexuality, food and the environment, health and body-politics, ethnicity, nationalism and 'race'." Peter Jackson, "Towards a Cultural Politics of Consumption," in *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*, ed. John Bird and others (Oxford/New York: Routledge, 1993), 208.

⁵⁵⁰ For an example of West German diplomacy to isolate the GDR in the Third World see William Glen Gray, *Germany's Cold War*.

⁵⁵¹ ICSID Constitution, adopted 17 September 1959, p. 2, 03-1-2, DAB.

that cultivated and maintained an interdisciplinary, multi-lingual design library in Darmstadt. In soliciting information about eastern European design publications from its GDR counterpart, the West German design council built first contacts with the East German Zentralinstitut (later renamed Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung) years before the latter applied for ICSID membership. However, these contacts were contained within the special domain of German-German relations.⁵⁵² With the ICSID's pending extension into the Eastern Bloc, these intangible relations would receive a novel quality. German-German interaction would become official, because it would take place within an international framework that accepted representatives from diplomatically recognized countries, which would force the West Germans to share German representation with East Germans, chipping away at the Federal Republic's *Alleinvertretungsanspruch*.

The GDR received provisional membership in 1967. Mia Seeger's successor, Fritz Gotthelf, thereafter intensified efforts to exclude the East Germans from the ICSID. He turned repeatedly to its executive board, explaining the delicate German diplomatic situation, but to no avail. The ICSID board assessed the German-German situation in the context of the East-West dualism, but had neither the interest nor the power to challenge the Cold War status quo of German division as a non-governmental organization. In July 1967, Gotthelf received a confidential letter from des Cressonnières, who stated that, after careful consideration, the board had decided to grant East Germany full membership. She encouraged Gotthelf to keep trying to "find the precedents necessary to satisfy the mind of our West German friends, because the Executive Committee has

⁵⁵² For details on the limited extent of German-German relations see Stefan Kreuzberger, *Kampf um die Einheit. Das gesamtdeutsche Ministerium und die politische Kultur des Kalten Krieges 1949-1969*. Schriften des Bundesarchivs 69 (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2008).

concluded that it was not possible to come to a decision, against all existing facts, about the re-unification of Germany!”⁵⁵³ Des Cressonnières ended her letter pointing to the fact that the ICSID had already granted provisional membership to a design society from the People’s Republic of China and would have to extend the same to the East German Zentralinstitut. Without the necessary diplomatic precedent, Gotthelf could do little else but accept the ICSID’s decision. After more than two years of string-pulling and backdoor diplomacy, he downplayed the importance of the matter in his response: “One Germany or two; we aren’t politicians.” Nevertheless, Gotthelf announced that West Germany would abstain from the vote on East Germany’s membership by being absent from the next congress “in an elegant manner.”⁵⁵⁴ But this last minute effort to save face could not cover up the fact that the FRG and its cultural representatives had suffered a significant loss in the battle for sole German representation in international bodies.

The ICSID’s extension eastwards followed typical Cold War diplomatic patterns (see figure 19). The first socialist member, Yugoslavia, only joined the ICSID in 1961, followed by the Soviet Union’s VNIITE design council in 1965. The novelty of eastward expansion both encouraged the West Germans to protest it and, at the same time, prepared the Eastern Bloc for possible diplomatic fall-out. While there is no evidence suggesting that the Eastern Bloc retreated to the same kind of lobbying done by Gotthelf to gain ICSID membership, these Eastern European states took a strong position against discrimination from the West. Yuri Soloviev, the head of VNIITE, sent the Executive Board a long appraisal of the role of industrial design in socialist societies. The paper defended the fact that Eastern Bloc design councils were often centralized state

⁵⁵³ Des Cressonnières to Fritz Gotthelf, 31 July 1967, 10-11-1, DAB.

⁵⁵⁴ Gotthelf to des Cressonnières, 2 August 1967, 10-11-1, DAB.

institutions and not professional associations.⁵⁵⁵ Despite initial hesitation on part of the ICSID board, the desire to grow from a transatlantic into a global organization won out over ideological reservations. As a result, an adjusted ICSID constitution allowed national members into the organization. Eventually, most of the eastern European industrial design institutions were admitted as member societies rather than “professional” members.⁵⁵⁶ The same applied to the Zentralinstitut when it requested membership at the Vienna Congress of the ICSID in 1965.⁵⁵⁷ The executive board passed the application in February 1967 for confirmation by the General Assembly in Canada in the fall of 1967.⁵⁵⁸

As the West Germans pushed forward their last intervention against GDR membership in the summer of 1967, tensions between the Zentralinstitut and the ICSID board rose. From the very beginning, the GDR took a “no nonsense” position vis-à-vis the West German attempts to exclude them from this organization. As a result of having encountered the Federal Republic’s *Alleinvertretungsanspruch* in other international bodies, the SED leadership suspected Western conspiracy behind the smallest diplomatic slip-up, and the East Germans became adamant about the correct representation of their country in name, flag, and national hymn. When the program for the ICSID Congress in Ottawa failed to identify the Zentralinstitut as an East German institution, its head Martin Kelm threatened to boycott the congress altogether.⁵⁵⁹ ICSID Secretary General des Cressonnières sent him a telegram to calm the situation, affirming that the nomination of

⁵⁵⁵ Yuri Soloviev, “Le Design et la Politique d’Etat dans les Pays Socialistes (sur l’Exemple de l’Union Sovietique et de la Republique Democratique Allemande),” n.d., 10-27-1, DAB.

⁵⁵⁶ Des Cressonnières to Yuri Soloviev, 9 July 1965, 10-27-1, DAB.

⁵⁵⁷ Des Cressonnières (Secretary General) to Kelm, 17 January 1965, 10-10-1, DAB.

⁵⁵⁸ Des Cressonnières (Secretary General) to Kelm, 13 February 1967, 10-10-1, DAB.

⁵⁵⁹ Kelm to des Cressonnières, 15 June 1967, 10-10-1, DAB.

the Zentralinstitut would be listed with the addendum “German Democratic Republic (GDR).”⁵⁶⁰

What seems like an unnecessary severing of relations with the ICSID to an outsider actually represented a fundamental building block of GDR foreign policy to gain formal recognition from the West as a legitimate state. For the GDR, membership in supposedly apolitical organizations was a stepping-stone towards attaining full membership in the international community and a seat in the United Nations. Moreover, as the tug-of-war over ICSID membership shows, both Germanys knew that each of these stepping-stones raised the stakes in the German-German Cold War over ideology, division, and international recognition. The ICSID eventually granted the GDR membership in Ottawa together with that of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria, in October 1967.⁵⁶¹ At this point, all of the Eastern Bloc countries with significant industries employing industrial designers gained membership in the ICSID, thus leveling the diplomatic playing field between eastern and western Europe.

Although West Germany’s diplomatic circles were not pleased with East Germany’s membership in the ICSID, the industrial design community certainly was. The West German design journal *Form*, a leading publication with significant influence on aesthetic discourse in the Federal Republic to the present day, considered the unfortunate diplomatic outcome as a blessing in disguise: “We welcome this step because, despite its admittedly similar mode of operation, the foundation of GDR design

⁵⁶⁰ Des Cressonnières to Kelm, 16 July 1967, 10-10-1, DAB.

⁵⁶¹ ICSID minutes, *Second General Assembly in Venice, Italy, 14 to 16 of September 1961*, ICSID 03-1-1, DAB; ICSID minutes, *Fifth General Assembly in Ottawa, 11 and 12 September 1967*, 03-03-1, DAB, there was no debate over East German membership in the minutes – it seems that the GDR membership was guaranteed by the Chinese precedent and the membership of West Germany.

is ideologically different. The membership of the GDR in the ICSID might perhaps offer more opportunities for knowledge exchange.”⁵⁶² It is striking that in the previous thirty-nine volumes of this design publication, there is not one major article about East Germany to be found.

A sudden spike of western interest in GDR design after its acceptance into the ICSID suggests that the logic of East German cultural diplomacy actually worked. The international validation of GDR design redirected the attention of designers in the Federal Republic. From this day forward projects from the other side of the wall became relevant to West Germans. In the same issue, *Form* directed attention to the leading East German design publication *Form und Zweck*. The article recognized the design journal “as an auxiliary bridge to compensate for the lack of personal exchange of experiences between East and West.”⁵⁶³ After ignoring *Form und Zweck* for ten years, West German designers thus began to take GDR design seriously and eventually discovered eastern publications as a means to stay informed about design developments there.

International Exhibitions and the Diplomatic Significance of Material Culture

The initial integration of Eastern European countries into the ICSID established official avenues for the Federal Republic and the GDR alike to pursue contacts on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Consequently, both the East and West German design councils worked their way toward establishing more formal relations with those nations. An air of competitiveness marked this second stage in German design diplomacy in which both parts of Germany tried to display material progressivism and economic

⁵⁶² “DDR im ICSID,” in *Form*, 40/1967, 64.

⁵⁶³ “Aus der DDR: *Form und Zweck* 1/67,” in *Form*, 40/1967, 75.

prowess to the other camp. The lingering German Question and East Berlin's legitimization efforts put FRG and GDR material culture face to face.

Prior personal and professional friendships facilitated this new task for the FRG. Mia Seeger, together with her Polish counterpart Zophia Szydlowska, the head of the design council Instytut Wzornictwa Przemyslowego, proposed the first West German exhibition in the Eastern Bloc.⁵⁶⁴ The two industrial design personalities had met at the 1960 Milan Triennial, where the German and Polish displays had adjoined one other. When Seeger saw the final blueprints for the exhibition space, she noticed a wall that demarcated the Polish exhibition from the German one. She immediately wrote to the Polish person in charge, "If I read your layout correctly, then you have erected a wall against the German section, your section against ours. This would greatly hinder the flow of visitors. In no way do we need a wall."⁵⁶⁵ The wall was never mentioned again and a lifelong friendship between the *grandes dames* of design ensued. The contribution that these women made towards constructive East-West exchanges in industrial design cannot be overestimated. For example, Szydlowska met Martin Kelm in East Berlin where she informed the head of the GDR design council about the industrial design work done in West Germany.⁵⁶⁶ The first FRG design show in the Eastern Bloc presented thus only one of many ways in which the two influenced Cold War design relations.

In 1967, this first West German exhibition in the Eastern Bloc that resulted from the friendship of Seeger and Szydlowska, titled Industrial Design from the FRG

⁵⁶⁴ Private and professional correspondence from Zophia Szydlowska to Mia Seeger, 1965-1967, Mia Seeger Estate, A 139, StSt.

⁵⁶⁵ Seeger quoted in Karin Kirsch, "Mia Seeger, 1903-1991," in *Baden-Württembergische Portraits: Frauengestalten aus fünf Jahrhunderten*, ed. Elisabeth Nölle-Neumann (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2000), 252.

⁵⁶⁶ Zofia Szydlowska to Mia Seeger, 15 December 1965, Mia Seeger Estate, A 139, StSt.

(*Industrielle Formgebung aus der BRD*), traveled to the Polish towns of Warsaw and Krakow first, and then moved on to Sofia in Bulgaria, and Zagreb in Yugoslavia. The West German organizers promoted this event as part of a series of Western European and Scandinavian exhibitions that had traveled the Eastern Bloc. Yet it took “cautious and balanced good will” on all sides to make this project happen.⁵⁶⁷ Once the exhibition had opened its doors to Polish visitors, more imponderable aspects specific to the FRG’s relations with the East surfaced. The underlying tone of the show was that of Western abundance and technical superiority consistent with Cold War competition for the people’s “heart and minds.” In a design journal review, Peter Frank, an exhibition supervisor and staff member close to Mia Seeger, reported his uneasiness regarding the excitement that Polish visitors expressed when seeing the exhibition objects: “As exhibition custodian, I receive the admiration of visitors with somewhat ambivalent feelings. The exhibition is more than simply a specific design show.” And he elaborated: “It is, like every documentation of a country’s national design standards, understood as a representation in its broadest sense. Perhaps design exhibitions are especially fitting for this purpose, particularly if they make evident that industrial design expresses more than just the immediate technological and economic niveau.”⁵⁶⁸ Not a design politician, but a rather young and eager design enthusiast, Frank only realized the show’s effect once it was on display.⁵⁶⁹ Observing the Polish reaction and trying to put it into perspective, Frank noted the historical and sociological dimensions of design evaluation. The West German products either were complete novelties in Poland or representatives of a

⁵⁶⁷ Peter Frank, “Westdeutsches Design in Polen,” in *Werk und Zeit*, July 1967.

⁵⁶⁸ Peter Frank, “Deutsches Design in Polen,” in *Form* 38/1967.

⁵⁶⁹ Peter Frank (Mia Seeger’s assistant and former head of the Essen and Stuttgart design councils) in discussion with the author, April 2009.

different economic and social pedigree. A bachelor kitchenette, embodying a particular Western lifestyle, exemplified this socio-historical difference.⁵⁷⁰ To the astonished Polish audience, both from a communist and a Catholic viewpoint, this single-person kitchen must have seemed like a waste of resources and a social oddity.

Two incidents heightened the West Germany's diplomatic advantage that derived from this event. Informational visits between GDR and Polish designers fell conveniently into the two-week period of the FRG exhibition in Warsaw. This afforded East German designers the opportunity to acquaint themselves with West German products that they had only before seen in print.⁵⁷¹ West Germany could once again demonstrate its superiority in product design. And while the unexpected visit surely caused great satisfaction to the Rat für Formgebung, the friendship between Seeger and Szydlowska yielded an even bigger success for West German diplomacy. After the show opening, Szydlowska organized a dinner party to honor her dear German friend. It was at this occasion that the Federal Republic's *chargé d'affairs* in Poland, who did not enjoy diplomatic status and had not secured formal recognition, was invited to an official Polish event for the first time.⁵⁷² Made possible by the ICSID and facilitated by the friendship of two extraordinary women, the FRG not only showed its material culture but also fortified relations in the Eastern Bloc.

West German engagement in the Eastern Bloc triggered East German concern about its position as one of the more developed industrial countries in the Soviet sphere of influence. If it were to be trumped by the Federal Republic in the realm of production

⁵⁷⁰ Peter Frank, "Westdeutsches Design in Polen," in *Werk und Zeit*, July 1967.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid..

⁵⁷² Kirsch, "Mia Seeger 1908-1991," 252

and consumer culture in front of its socialist friends, the East German politicians feared a loss of prestige and leadership in the COMECON. Within months of the West German traveling exhibition, the Zentralinstitut put together its own concept for a traveling exhibition that would feature GDR state-of-the-art interior design. The show *Function – Shape – Quality* (*Funktion – Form – Qualität*) traveled through the Eastern Bloc for two years, imitating the route of the West German exhibition by starting in Warsaw and then progressing to Krakow. The Zentralinstitut modeled the size and the concept of the exhibition after what the Federal Republic had presented just months earlier.⁵⁷³ Instead of stressing difference and superiority, as the Federal Republic's exhibition had done, the GDR attempted to win over their Polish audience with a “people-bonding” (*völkerverbindend*) message: “The prognosis, planning, management and regulation of industrial design weighs heavily on the control of the socio-technological organism of a nation and the community of socialist people.”⁵⁷⁴ Situating industrial design as a common challenge for all socialist nations, the GDR clearly sought its inclusion in the ideological and practical problem-solving process within the COMECON. The intended audience, however, included professionals beyond the Eastern Bloc as invitations went out to numerous Western design councils and design schools.⁵⁷⁵ Consequently, this exhibition served two purposes. First, it declared the state of industrial design in the GDR – in practice and theory – to both friends and foes. Second, it signaled the communalities with

⁵⁷³ Transcript, Besprechung am 14. September 1967, Zentralinstitut für Gestaltung, Abt. IV, Sektor Ausstellungen, betr. Ausstellung „Funktion – Form – Qualität“ in Warschau, 18 September 1967, Folder “Ausstellung ‘Funktion – Form – Qualität’ Warschau 1967 Berichte/Verträge,” SiG.

⁵⁷⁴ Opening speech, Martin Kelm, 13 September 1967, Folder “Ausstellung ‘Funktion – Form – Qualität’ Warschau 1967 / Texte,” SiG.

⁵⁷⁵ Responses from the German, Finnish, and English design councils, see Folder “Ausstellung ‘Funktion – Form – Qualität’ Warschau 1967 Berichte/Verträge,” SiG.

other socialist nations. This exhibition later toured through the Eastern Bloc for the years to come, although it was never exhibited in the West.

As the title “Function – Shape – Quality” suggests, the show’s focus linked aesthetics to functionality. It was the first GDR display that featured design as an important quality factor of industrial production. More than 150 objects and group displays, thirty photographic displays, and eight models provided a comprehensive overview of East German industrial design.⁵⁷⁶ An introductory display on German design history between 1900 and 1933 greeted visitors, deliberately excluding the Nazi period (see figure 20). The next part of the exhibition introduced attendees to the German arts and crafts tradition and provided an overview over design education in the GDR. The rest of the exhibition directed attention to significant aesthetic challenges in socialist societies: design solutions that “integrated the cultural and the utility value of the product” for work environments, domestic spaces, and leisure, mirroring the categorized and state-organized life of the socialist citizen.⁵⁷⁷

The ideological component of the exhibition was especially apparent in the accompanying catalogue. It explained the role design ought to play in socialist societies. “The world that humans shape has a shaping influence on them in return. The properties, benefits, and shapes of man-made objects stimulate peoples’ behavior and relationship to the world.” This “stimulation” was further explained: “Their usage, that is the experience of the objects’ material, construction, and function, which come together in the design, leads in the end to the unlocking new human senses and to the activation of satisfaction,

⁵⁷⁶ G. Knobloch, “Form – Funktion – Qualität: Das Zentralinstitut für Gestaltung stellte in Warschau aus,” *Silikattechnik* 19, no. 4 (1968): 122.

⁵⁷⁷ T. Reindl, Report on the exhibition Formgestaltung der DDR (FFQ), undated translation (spring 1968), Folder “Ausstellung ‘Funktion – Form – Qualität’ Warschau 1967 Berichte/Verträge u.ä.,” SiG.

pleasure, and joy of living.”⁵⁷⁸ Although the explanation may sound like the definition of hedonistic consumption, this relationship between humans and their material environment was central to the mid-1960s understanding of production and consumption in the GDR. The idea of “humanistic Socialism” placed humans at the center of design with the goal of creating an environment that served the needs of the population. The degree to which a product fulfilled these needs determined its ideological value. This attitude represents a decisive shift away from the heavy-industry emphasis of the early GDR connected to Ulbricht’s New Economic System policies that had opened up the East German economy to a more consumer-oriented planning in 1963.

Generally speaking, the catalogue revised many of the more extreme ideological stances that the GDR had taken in the 1950s and early 1960s. The historical section even exonerated the Bauhaus, which had been vanquished from the GDR’s cultural heritage during the Formalism Debate in the early 1950s. Instead of the previous critique labeling Weimar modernism as cosmopolitan, the Zentralinstitut changed course by 1967 and crowned the Bauhaus as the highest developmental stage among a series of design initiatives coming from the East German territory, including the Deutsche Werkstätten and the Werkbund. The catalog text for the Function – Shape – Quality exhibition in Moscow two years later even integrated the Bauhaus into leftist, that is socialist, opposition to the Hitler regime pointing out that the Nazis closed down the design school as a “hotbed of cultural Bolshevism.”⁵⁷⁹ One of the pieces displayed, a furniture program developed by Rudolf Horn, designer and lecturer at the School for Applied Arts Halle –

⁵⁷⁸ Catalog text, *Funktion – Form – Qualität*, 1967, “Ausstellung ‘Funktion – Form – Qualität’ Warschau 1967 / Texte,” SiG.

⁵⁷⁹ Catalog text, “Funktion – Form – Qualität” 1969 in the Soviet Union, 3 March 1969, Folder “Funktion – Form – Qualität UdSSR 1969,” SiG.

Burg Giebichenstein for the furniture combine Deutsche Werkstätten Hellerau, epitomized the newfound sense of modernistic tradition and a humanistic outlook on production. Providing a series of furniture pieces that could be added as needed, the *Möbelprogramm Deutsche Werkstätten* (MDW) offered individual furniture elements that the consumer could combine to accommodate individual needs and changing personal as well as spatial living situations. This furniture program completed the idea of a rationalized and standardized production, as all the pieces of the program, whether a bookshelf board or a couch element, fit perfectly together wherever the consumer decided to put them.

Polish media extensively advertised the show during its run from December 11, 1967 until January 20, 1968. Numerous Polish politicians and designers visited the displays. Newspaper reviews reveal that the exhibition's novelty, unlike its West German counterpart, was not the display of unfamiliar products, since these were mostly available on the Polish market. Rather, the fascination lay with the process described in the displays: the development of a design culture and its subsequent appropriation by industry.⁵⁸⁰ Especially the integration of design into the economic planning process found wide admiration among the Polish press, as illustrated by the Zentralinstitut's relocation from the Ministry of Culture to the German Office for Standardization and Product Testing (*Deutsches Amt für Messwesen and Warenprüfung*, DAMW) in 1965. It is here that the contradiction between the ideological superstructure and its practical application in the realm of production lies. While the catalogs stressed the cultural and utility value

⁵⁸⁰ "Wystawa Wzornictwa z NRD," *Zycie Warszawa*, 12 December 1967 and "Wystawa wzornictwa przemyslowe NRD," *Trybuna Ludu*, 12 December 1967.

of industrial design, GDR presenters emphasized its economic benefits at the symposia framing the exhibition.

The mid-1960s were a moment in which the GDR repositioned its aesthetic and functionalist outlook. Socialist ideology and the stylistic and social considerations surrounding industrial design merged in humanistic socialism after a decade of divergence and ideological contradiction. The new interest in individual needs over the collective economy increasingly contributed to a more consumer-oriented way of design and the rediscovery of the Weimar modernism as leftist aesthetics. At the same time, the individual solutions such as the MDW furniture program enabled increasing standardization of production, which in turn helped preserve resources. Yet, as discussed earlier, the mismanagement of the planned economy would eventually ruin this moment of sublime convergence. The GDR economy remained an “economy of scarcity” (*Mangelwirtschaft*), in which consumers waited for years to attain coveted furniture, cars, or other technical equipment. The rehabilitation of the Bauhaus tradition in East Germany signaled once more the GDR’s determination to competing aesthetically with Western Europe in general and with the Federal Republic in particular.

To truly engage the West German activities abroad and claim a place among modern industrialized nations, the GDR showed their design presence and expertise in Western countries as well. In this regard, ICSID membership decisively opened western doors to GDR design. After the success in this international organization, East Germany’s next step towards diplomatic recognition established bilateral cultural and economic relations with western democracies. After a failed attempt at displaying industrial design at a 1967 multinational ICSID exhibition project in Barcelona, the Zentralinstitut focused

its efforts on an exhibition in London, whose goal was to combine political and economic aims in a cultural event. By displaying products that fulfilled the highest international standards of quality and design in combination with the clear and unwavering usage of GDR insignia, the exhibition planners wanted to impress a strong notion of the characteristics of their socialist economy on Great Britain.⁵⁸¹ They further envisioned broad coverage in design publications as well as an involvement of the ICSID. Yet what sounds like a straightforward event demanded much diplomatic skill. At first, the general idea of a GDR design exhibition found fertile ground in England. Sir Paul Reilly, the head of the British Council of Industrial Design (CoID) and an active member of the ICSID, had visited the East German design council in April 1970 and knew about the state of design there.⁵⁸² But the difficulties started with negotiations between both parties about an exhibition venue that might accomplish two things at the same time: first, the location had to be humble enough to avoid the impression that the British government entertained quasi-official relations with the socialist GDR; and second, the venue needed to be representative enough not to humiliate the guests. In the end, the Ceylon Tea Center, a Sri Lankan trade forum, served as the exhibition space.

After finalizing the diplomatic intricacies and the exhibition layout, the staff of the GDR design council began writing texts that described the exhibition objects. Upon receiving the texts for the placards and the catalog, both loaded with socialist language, Sir Paul Reilly retracted his agreement to open the exhibition, a personal favor through which the East Germans had hoped to gain semi-official British endorsement. At the

⁵⁸¹ German British Association, Protocol, *über die Beratung zur DDR-Design-Ausstellung am 4.2.1970*, 5 February 1970, Folder "Ausstellung London 1970 – Schriftwechsel," SiG.

⁵⁸² Sir Paul Reilly to Martin Kelm, 20 May 1970, Folder "Ausstellung London 1970 – Schriftwechsel," SiG.

outset, he made it clear that he “was happy to open an exhibition which was entirely on the subject of Design and did not contain any political or ideological allusions, however slight.”⁵⁸³ As head of a government-supported organization, he could not be in a position to open an ideologically inscribed event. If the GDR wanted him back on board, Sir Paul Reilly demanded that the Zentralinstitut change the texts. From this point on, opinions within East German official circles diverged extremely. On one side stood the quasi-diplomatic body that managed relations with London, the German-British Society. The society favored changing the texts over losing Sir Paul Reilly. “If opened by SPR [Sir Paul Reilly], the exhibition ‘GDR Design 70’ would gain a denotative official character in contrast to similar GDR events in Great Britain. It would hence represent an important precedent for future activities toward the GDR’s diplomatic recognition by Great Britain.”⁵⁸⁴ On the other side, the DAMW, the Zentralinstitut’s superior governmental institution, opposed any alterations on the grounds that “the revisions would mean abandonment of our class point of view (*Klassenstandpunkt*) in the conflict with theoreticians of late-bourgeois design conceptions.”⁵⁸⁵ Beyond the ideological issues at play, the DAMW also pointed to the possibility that others, especially West German officials, could utilize such altered texts politically against the GDR. In the end, the possible diplomatic gains won out over ideological concerns. The Zentralinstitut revised the entirety of the texts and thus completely re-inscribed socialist material culture with new meaning – a meaning that would cater to Western European sensibilities about

⁵⁸³ Sir Paul Reilly to Martin Kelm, 20 May 1970, Folder “Ausstellung London 1970 – Schriftwechsel,” SiG. Lex Hornsby to Knobloch, 3 July 1970, Folder “Ausstellung London 1970 – Schriftwechsel,” SiG.

⁵⁸⁴ Internal memo, Reißmann to Zipfel, Information über die Vorbereitung der Ausstellung “GDR Design ’70“ in London,” 8 July 1970, Folder Ausstellung London 1970 – Schriftwechsel, SiG.

⁵⁸⁵ Internal memo, Reißmann to Zipfel, Information über die Vorbereitung der Ausstellung “GDR Design ’70“ in London,” 8 July 1970, Folder Ausstellung London 1970 – Schriftwechsel, SiG.

individuality and that erased any trace of open state socialism from the displays. The quote in the original read as follows:

New standards for the quality of industrial products are derived from the development of the socialist order in the GDR. Manufactures are an essential part of our environment. They influence people's way of living within every area. The quality of material and ideological needs also depend on product design.⁵⁸⁶

The revised, English translation purged the Marxist language and over-simplified the texts:

New standards of quality have been set for industrial products. It is recognised that as an essential part of our environment these influence man in all spheres of his life. Ideally, every product should be an expression of certain requirements, both physical and aesthetic."⁵⁸⁷

The exhibition now underlined the humanistic aspects of GDR design culture. As Martin Kelm stated in his opening remarks: "It is the goal in our society to positively influence all of the factors affecting human beings and to create an environment in which one can experience the challenging notion of humanism."⁵⁸⁸ Yet Kelm tried to reinsert ideological messages on a middle ground between Marxist ideology and humanism:

As you know, we abolished the hurdles of private ownership of property as well as means of production in order to undertake planning that serves across societal interests. The people own everything. The people can determine their own fortunes. Hence, we have the potential to design an environment that serves the people's interests. We work on utilizing these opportunities and on putting industrial design to work in creating a complexly designed humanistic environment.⁵⁸⁹

As seen in the catalog for the 1967 Warsaw exhibition, the concept of Marxist humanism was not entirely new. In the mid-1960s, "socialist humanism" became a key

⁵⁸⁶ Draft, Ausstellungstexte: Englische Endfassung, n.d., Folder "Ausstellung London 1970 – Texte," SiG

⁵⁸⁷ Zentralinstitut, Entwürfe für Ausstellungstexte: Englische Endfassung, n.d., Folder "Ausstellung London 1970 – Texte," SiG.

⁵⁸⁸ Martin Kelm, Opening speech for "DDR-Design 70" in London 1970, Folder "Ausstellung London 1970 – Texte," SiG.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid.

term in the rapprochement of eastern and western Marxists.⁵⁹⁰ This school of Marxist thought opposed the structural mechanisms of state socialism and instead emphasized subjectivity and human agency in socialist theory. Socialist humanism mitigated the ideological opposition between Western democracies and socialist groups, parties, and even states. It also contributed to a period of western Eurocommunism in the 1960s and 1970s by enabling the cooperation of bourgeois and leftist parties in western democratic governments, such as the Labour governments in Britain and the Great Coalition in West Germany.⁵⁹¹

At the London exhibition, the GDR thus strategically, if inconsistently, employed the concept of socialist humanism, which opposed the very nature of the centrally structured SED state. To convey this humanistic approach materially, the exhibition consciously minimized the heavy industrial sector – which, in reality, constituted the real strength of the GDR economy – and instead displayed more objects that related to the everyday.⁵⁹² It especially featured leisure-time objects, such as patio furniture and toys (see figures 21 and 22): “These items are not only excellently designed, but also pedagogically valuable and fulfill therapeutic requirements. The colorful, imaginatively arranged, and multiform toys bestow the entire exhibition with a friendly and casual

⁵⁹⁰ In the mid-1960s, leftist writers from East and West came together by invitation of Erich Fromm to contribute to the publication of *An International Symposium of Socialist Humanism* (1965) to stimulate Eastern-Western dialogue. Among the contributors are Herbert Marcuse, Raya Dunayevskaya, Ernst Bloch, T.B. Bottomore, Lucien Goldman, Maximilien Rubel, Eugene Kamenka, Oskar Schatz, Irving Fletcher, Mathilde Niel, Ernst Florian Winter, Wolfgang Abendroth, Norman Thomas, Bertrand Russell, Stephen King Hall, and Calvano della Volpe from the West and Predrag Vranicki, Gajo Petrović, Mihailo Marković, Veljko Korać, Danilo Pejović, Rudi Supek, Karel Kosík, Ivan Sviták, Milan Průcha, and Bronislaw Baczko from the Communist countries as well as Léopold Senghor and Nirmal Kumar Bose from the Third World countries.

⁵⁹¹ Jean-François Revel, “The Myths of Eurocommunism,” *Foreign Affairs* 56, no. 2 (1978).

⁵⁹² Ekkehard Bartsch, “DDR-Design am Londoner Piccadilly Square,” *Sonntag* 43 (1970), 15.

atmosphere.”⁵⁹³ A color slide presentation about Karl-Marx-Stadt’s reconstruction (today Chemnitz) transported visitors into an ideal socialist environment where public buildings, public art, the health establishment, and urban infrastructure coalesced. Apparently, the message resonated with the British audience. On September 9, 1970, even the conservative *Daily Telegraph* titled its story on the GDR design exhibition “Humane East Germans.”⁵⁹⁴

In the end, the London exhibition far exceeded the expectations and hopes of diplomatic circles in the GDR. East German products ranging from pictures of heavy work equipment to displays of prized china and glassware created the impression of a progressive material culture. Yet visitors not only saw industrial design on display but also GDR literature and picture albums meant to foster a better understanding of this socialist country.⁵⁹⁵ Representatives from several eastern European countries, as well as the cultural attaché of the American embassy in London and a few British members of parliament, among other London notables, attended the opening reception. In his speech, Sir Paul Reilly affirmed the bilateral interest in fostering trade relations between Great Britain and the GDR “whether officially or unofficially.”⁵⁹⁶ Not to take advantage of this sizable market, he maintained, “would be ludicrous for a trading people like the British.” Yet he acknowledged the unusual diplomatic situation indirectly, hoping that “no-one here feels any compunction about being present to wish this exhibition well. It is indeed

⁵⁹³ Knobloch, “DDR-Design in Großbritannien,” *Silikattechnik* 21, no. 9 (1970): 318.

⁵⁹⁴ “Humane East Germans,” *The Daily Telegraph*, 9 September 1970.

⁵⁹⁵ Memo, Ergebnisse der Ausstellung “DDR-Design ‘70” in London in der Zeit vom 7. bis 19.9.1970 und Schlußfolgerungen für künftige Ausstellungsvorhaben, n.d., Folder “Ausstellung London 1970 – Texte,” SiG.

⁵⁹⁶ Sir Paul Reilly, Opening Speech at the “GDR Design ‘70” exhibition in the Ceylon Tea Center, 7 September, 1970, Folder “Ausstellung London 1970 – Texte,” SiG.

innocent self-interest that brings us all together here, since trade is properly a two-way traffic and cannot be conducted without reasonable personal contacts.”⁵⁹⁷

The exhibition lasted from September 7 till September 19, 1970, and turned out a success for GDR foreign policy.⁵⁹⁸ 1067 visitors signed a guest book, but a CoID report suspected that more people actually saw the show.⁵⁹⁹ Visitors nominated the tea china, glassware, and toys as their favorite objects on display. English visitors commented on the good quality of GDR design and the sophistication of the exhibition system. Many agreed that there was much more to learn about the GDR and wanted to deepen relations with the country. In the days following the exhibition opening, major design organizations in England invited the GDR delegation to talks.⁶⁰⁰ The final Zentralinstitut report showed great satisfaction with the way the exhibition demonstrated the GDR’s capability in the field of design. It concluded that the actual design and content of the exhibition contributed tremendously to this diplomatic success.⁶⁰¹

With the establishment of official cultural relations via the ICSID, the field opened up for either Germany, respectively, to push for improved relations on the opposite side of the Iron Curtain. In this fashion, the FRG could capitalize on the personal contacts of Mia Seeger to set in motion the first West German exhibition in the East. While the West Germans scored with novelties and triggered interest with “unusual” objects like the bachelor kitchenette, East German designers struggled with the

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ Press Release, Lex Hornsby & Partner Ltd, “GDR Design ’70,” Folder London 1970 – Texte, SiG.

⁵⁹⁹ CoID report on the exhibition, n.d., translated from the English original, Folder London 1970 – Texte, SiG

⁶⁰⁰ “DDR-Design ‘70’ in London,” in *Form*, 2/1970, 62.

⁶⁰¹ Memo, Ergebnisse der Ausstellung “DDR-Design ‘70’ in London in der Zeit vom 7. bis 19.9.1970 und Schlußfolgerungen für künftige Ausstellungsvorhaben, n.d., Folder “Ausstellung London 1970 – Texte,” SiG.

appropriate representation of their industrial design. Using industrial design events to gain political recognition in the West, the GDR followed a path of cultural diplomacy and ideological bartering. The GDR had to sacrifice its ideological convictions in order to make the political message behind socialist material culture palatable to the West. The re-inscription of GDR material culture as an expression of humanistic ideals in socialism signified a decisive shift in the self-conception of cultural diplomacy in East Germany: political goals became more important than ideological consistency.

Diplomacy of German Design: the German-German Basic Treaty

The process of gradual German rapprochement through the debates and projects revolving around the ICSID membership was magnified in the bi- and multilateral negotiations leading up to the Helsinki Accords of 1975. The early 1970s were a special moment in German-German relations: superpower détente policies facilitated a period of East-West engagement. This watershed policy change from deterrence to dialogue resulted in the SALT I and SALT II treaties that limited Soviet and US nuclear arsenals and stopped the escalation of superpower conflicts for almost a full decade, thus affirming the Cold War *status quo*.

Intertwined with these negotiations of superpower relations was the ongoing German Question: the national status of a divided country and its diplomatic recognition. In a first step, Chancellor Willy Brandt, who had opened up FRG diplomacy to negotiations with the Eastern Bloc in his prior office as foreign minister, intensified these

efforts when he was elected in 1969.⁶⁰² Brandt's policy revised the previous conservative "policy of strength" that the Adenauer government had followed in western integration (*Westbindung*) between 1949 and 1966, convinced that West Germany's rearmament and NATO membership would necessarily lead to reunification. Twenty years later, the Berlin Wall as the "anti-fascist barrier" symbolized the failure of Adenauer's strategy because it exacerbated security concerns in the Soviet Union and among Germany's eastern neighbors. In the absence of a peace treaty, border questions had remained unresolved. One of the central demands of the Eastern Bloc was the West German acknowledgement of the eastern German border, the Oder-Neisse-Line, as the permanent settlement of WWII territorial claims. Under the auspices of Brandt's policy of rapprochement, Bonn affirmed these borders in 1970 in the Moscow Treaty with the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Treaty with Poland. Brandt's close adviser Egon Bahr put Bonn's new strategy in the German Question in a nutshell when he stated "responsibility for Germany had to be borne by Germans themselves."⁶⁰³

The ultimate goal of Brandt's Eastern Policy (*Ostpolitik*), however, was to reestablish some kind of national context for the two German states.⁶⁰⁴ It was therefore crucial "to restore at least some aspects of the pre-World War II links between the two halves of Germany [...]"⁶⁰⁵ In this way, Brandt's *Ostpolitik* differed greatly from superpower détente, because it sought to change the Cold War *status quo*. To realize the

⁶⁰² Hans Otto Bräutigam, *Ständige Vertretung: Meine Jahre in Ost-Berlin* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 2009), 29-30.

⁶⁰³ Egon Bahr and Michel Vale, "Bearing Responsibility for Germany: Twenty Years of the Wall – Ten Years of the Four-Power Agreement," *International Journal of Politics* 13, no. 1/2, German Debates Defense (1983): 74.

⁶⁰⁴ For an in-depth discussion of the Federal Republic's Eastern policy see Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent* (New York: Random House, 1993).

⁶⁰⁵ M.E. Sarotte, *Dealing with the Devil: East Germany, Détente & Ostpolitik, 1969-1973* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 175.

eastern policy regarding East Germany, Brandt needed greater independence from external powers “to create living conditions far better than those enforced by Cold War rivalries.”⁶⁰⁶ After twenty years, the FRG thus gave up its foreign policy maxim of *Alleinvertretungsanspruch vis-à-vis* the GDR, abolished the Hallstein Doctrine, and entered official negotiations with the other part of Germany.⁶⁰⁷ The superpowers on both sides observed this German-German rapprochement with mixed feelings. On the one hand, the Germans had to find a way to coexist, but on the other hand, the possible option of German unification under the umbrella of the opposing system presented a scenario that neither side wanted to see unfold. Washington was especially nervous about the degree of independence displayed by West German diplomats and their willingness to cooperate with Soviet diplomats in order to achieve their political goals. The Soviets were less nervous about the GDR leadership, whom they kept on a short leash throughout the negotiation process.⁶⁰⁸ While the superpowers saw German division as a means for peace in Europe, Germans argued with increasing intensity that the division was a major cause for tension.⁶⁰⁹

As the Moscow and Warsaw treaties still lingered in West German parliament awaiting ratification and the Four Power Agreement on Berlin had just been signed, talks

⁶⁰⁶ Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 220.

⁶⁰⁷ Bräutigam, *Ständige Vertretung*, 30.

⁶⁰⁸ For a detailed discussion of the negotiations and diplomatic contacts between the two German states and the American and Soviet superpowers see Sarotte, *Dealing with the Devil*, 129 and 167.

⁶⁰⁹ Gert Krell, “West German Ostpolitik and the German Question,” *Journal of Peace Research* 28, no. 3 (1991): 315. See also Ulrich Albrecht, “Security and the German Question,” *World Policy Journal* 1, no. 3 (1984): 575-602. Germans were joined by other Europeans, like the Swedish disarmament expert Alva Myrdal, who realized the “touchiness” of the German situation during the reinvigorated Cold War of the early 1980s. Herbert Ammon and Peter Brandt, “The Relevance of the German Question for Peace in Europe,” *International Journal of Politics* 13, no. 1/2, Germany Debates Defense (1983): 96.

between East and West Germany commenced.⁶¹⁰ After the signing of two technical agreements, the Transit Accord and the Traffic Treaty that established regulations for the passage of West German citizens and goods through the GDR, by the summer of 1972, the East and West Germans entered negotiations about the substantial issues in their relations: the national question, the absence of a peace treaty and the presence of the Four Powers, and the question of citizenship. West Germany agreed to the “two states in one nation” principle by acknowledging the GDR under constitutional law, but not under international law. Bonn added a unilateral qualification that they therefore did not consider citizenship to be regulated. Both sides signed the Basic Treaty (short for “Treaty Concerning the Basis of Relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic”) in December 1972 after curtailed negotiations that left some of the issues unresolved. Over the next two decades, the Federal Republic would spend millions for the Transit Accord annually, which included visa charges and tariffs. Bonn would also pay more than DM 3.5 billion “to secure the release of roughly 34,000 [political] prisoners and reunite approximately 250,000 families divided by the Wall.”⁶¹¹

West German willingness to pay enormous sums for the transit regulations highlights Bonn’s efforts to ameliorate interpersonal relations between the East and West German populations. It also proved Germans’ willingness to take responsibility in the German Question and acknowledge that the “only way of overcoming the realities of the

⁶¹⁰ Egon Bahr maintained in 1983 that the Four-Power Agreement on Berlin would have not materialized without the active contribution of the two German states. He concluded that the four powers “could no longer undertake any measures in the center of Europe that touched Germany without the two German states also participating.” Bahr and Vale, “Bearing Responsibility for Germany,” 78.

⁶¹¹ Sarotte, *Dealing with the Devil*, 149.

division was to begin by accepting them.”⁶¹² At the core of this policy lay the hope that increased interaction between East and West would lead to the demise of the GDR and the end of German division. However, the SED completely controlled contacts between their population and the West: visas for visits to the West warranted a complicated application process, packages and mail from the West were searched, and – as Stasi files later revealed – Western visitors were monitored for the majority of their stay. Whereas the GDR pronounced the desired official quality of contacts between – from their vantage point – two separate states by sending representatives of their Foreign Office (MfAA) to the German-German negotiations, the FRG counteracted these aspirations by assigning the Ministry for Pan-German Affairs, thus emphasizing a national frame. This negotiation strategy went beyond the question of recognition and underlined western endeavors to break down the literal and figurative walls that the SED had erected between people that shared cultural and political roots. The Brandt government attempted to reach an agreement that deregulated human interaction between East and West Germans and limited institutional or official interference. Bonn hoped to strengthen the links between the two parts of Germany with the goal of reinforcing feelings of national unity.⁶¹³

In this light, the specifics of German-German cultural exchanges agreed upon in the Basic Treaty, namely the Cultural Accord (*Kulturabkommen*), provide an excellent window into the cultural policy principles of efforts to “normalize” East-West relations on both sides. They also reveal West Germany’s longterm goals for *Ostpolitik*. The FRG wanted a cultural agreement with an “individual component” that would deregulate cultural exchanges between the German populations by allowing non-state actors to

⁶¹² Krell, “West German Ostpolitik and the German Question,” 318.

⁶¹³ Suri, *Power and Protest*, 218.

initiate and conduct cultural events on the other side of the border.⁶¹⁴ The Federal Republic's Permanent Representation in East Berlin, which the FRG had set up instead of an embassy in the aftermath of the Basic Treaty, and the GDR Foreign Ministry carried out the talks. Beginning in 1974, the Permanent Representation staff functioned as mediators for political issues, economic cooperation, and cultural contacts concerning both parts of Germany. Because the negotiations about the *Kulturabkommen* remained unresolved for twelve years,⁶¹⁵ both Germanys agreed on the state-facilitated cultural exchange (*staatlich vermittelter Kulturaustausch*) as an interim solution to enable mutual visits of theater companies, choirs, and museum exhibitions. Several reasons account for this long period of negotiations. The initial five rounds of talks between 1973 and 1975 brought no results because the GDR claimed ownership of cultural artifacts that the FRG had included in a new culture foundation, the Prussian Cultural Heritage (*Preussischer Kulturbesitz*).⁶¹⁶ East Germany also contested the inclusion of West Berlin in the *Kulturabkommen*. Together, these issues brought the deliberations to a screeching halt until 1982.⁶¹⁷

The points of contention were not only a result of the hasty and incomplete negotiations of the Basic Treaty, but also of the souring of German-German relations in the aftermath of the 1975 Helsinki Accords. Suddenly, the GDR changed its position

⁶¹⁴ The East German-Austrian cultural accords served as an inspiration for this part of the German-German agreement.

⁶¹⁵ *Treaty on Cultural Cooperation Between the Governments of the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic*, 6 May 1986.

⁶¹⁶ Internal memo, Mahnke, zum Kulturabkommen, 28 April 1986.

⁶¹⁷ It was impossible for the FRG to meet this request, as the claim to West Berlin had constituted an integral part of its diplomacy vis-à-vis Eastern socialism throughout the Cold War. John F. Kennedy once called the city "a defended island of freedom." If West Berlin, arguably a culturally striving city by the mid-1970s, would be excluded from the agreement it would mean a great loss of diplomatic and cultural prowess for the FRG.

from dialogue to delineation, as “internal problems increased under the influence of détente” and, encouraged by the Helsinki human rights stipulations, GDR citizens began to reject the socialist system openly.⁶¹⁸ Frustrated by the East German change of course, Bonn insisted on continuing the “policy of normalization” despite eastern resistance.⁶¹⁹ Meanwhile, the interim solution of state-regulated cultural exchanges suited the GDR. With the cultural accords in limbo, the SED maintained command over contacts between East and West and did not shy away from leveraging this control to complicate cultural exchange whenever Cold War tensions between East and West arose. The FRG, on the other hand, participated in the state-mediated cultural exchanges because it saw this agreement as an opportunity to wiggle its way into the cultural calendar of the GDR – an opportunity to reconnect with the other Germany and to shape East German perceptions of the Federal Republic. Eventually, Honecker dropped the *Preussischer Kulturbesitz* to the bottom of the list in order to recommence talks in 1983. Twelve more German-German negotiation rounds ended successfully with the signing of the *Kulturabkommen* on May 6, 1986.

As clear as the lines of argumentation on both parts appear to be, public disagreement with the West German diplomacy surrounding the *Kulturabkommen* certainly grew over the negotiation period. The most prominent critic was Günter Grass, world-renowned author and artist. In a newspaper interview with the *Rheinischer Merkur*, Grass criticized the diplomatic aspect of the agreement because it was negotiated as if the

⁶¹⁸ Bräutigam, Vermerk für Gaus, betr. Gespräch mit dem Chefredakteur der außenpolitischen Zeitschrift „Horizont“ am 20. Oktober 1976, 25 October 1976, B 288/75, BAK.

⁶¹⁹ Foreign Ministry to StäV, NfD, 21 January 1977, B 288/75, BAK. Despite the technical agreements reached between the FRG and the GDR, East German diplomats complicated the interaction with West Germany’s Permanent Representation to such a degree that Chancellor Helmut Schmidt protested this behavior in a public speech. He called it “a sign of lacking confidence of the GDR leadership in their political position.”

two Germanys were foreign territory to each other, like a treaty with France or Finland. Instead, he warned that the Federal Republic gave up the last piece of commonality between East and West and insisted that “the agreement should have been made on the basis of a shared culture and history.”⁶²⁰ The political and economic division had long been established, but the realm of culture had proven resistant against the division process. The agreement, in Grass’ opinion, put this resistance into question. Grass had previously approached the FRG government with his concerns about the cultural treaty’s effects between East and West Germany. As an alternative, he suggested a German-German national cultural foundation to ensure the continuation of the German *Kulturnation*.⁶²¹ “Such a solution – in the tradition of the Paulskirche – could contribute to the development of a new understanding of ‘nation’, which would exclude reunification, but, on the other hand, could assist Germans in two states to find a new, relaxed (*unverkrampt*) self-understanding. This would also preclude a renewed political power built-up in the center of Europe. Our neighbors in East and West needn’t fear such a development any more.”⁶²² Apart from this universalist, pacifist idea for a German future, the main danger of these policies Grass attested for the arts and their production: the *Kulturabkommen* would promote only what was officially acceptable art on both sides, thus implicitly censoring the diversity of artistic expression. Grass exclaimed that “everywhere where art, where literature, where painting is created, it is necessarily

⁶²⁰ Günter Grass, “Wir geben das letzte aus der Hand, was grenzübergreifend ist. Günter Grass im Interview über das Kulturabkommen mit der DDR,” interview by Stephan Lohr, *Rheinischer Merkur*, 1 April 1986.

⁶²¹ Dr. von Richthofen to MD Günther Meichsner at BMB, 21 October 1985, B 288/493, BAK.

⁶²² Günter Grass to President Richard von Weizsäcker, 6 September 1985, B 288/493, BAK.

subversive, and it will thus be, perhaps even from both sides, be held back.”⁶²³ The *Kulturabkommen*, despite its intentions of enabling a cultural exchange at the level of the population, could possibly become a tool for state censorship of the arts.

Despite Grass’ warnings, the Federal Republic pursued the *Kulturabkommen* to normalize German-German relations. Rather than Grass’ theoretical contemplations of the treaty’s meaning for the German national idea, politicians in the FRG valued its practical merits: they could hold the GDR leadership accountable to the signed treaty, but not to a, to them, lofty idea of a unified *Kulturnation* that would not practice or exchange features of this culture.

German-German State-mediated Cultural Exchange and the *Kulturabkommen*

The significance of the *Kulturabkommen* as a cornerstone of self-determined German Cold War policy becomes evident when we look at two industrial design exhibitions taking place two years before and two years after the signing of the accord: the FRG exhibition Design – Thinking Ahead for Humanity (*Design – Vorausdenken für den Menschen*) in East Berlin (1984) and the Design in the GDR (*Design in der DDR*) exhibition in Stuttgart (1988). The principle of reciprocity, the planning process, and the execution of these design exhibitions showcase the political strategies behind intra-German cultural exchanges.

The idea for the western design exhibition originated in 1983 against the backdrop of deteriorating East-West relations during the Geneva talks about stationing American

⁶²³ Günter Grass, interview by Stephan Lohr, *Rheinischer Merkur*, 1 April 1986.

Pershing missiles in West Germany.⁶²⁴ At one point, a GDR Politburo member even hinted at military consequences if Geneva were to fail.⁶²⁵ In this tense atmosphere, Bonn commissioned the Rat für Formgebung to put together a concept for a West German industrial design exhibition. The Federal Ministry for Inter-German Relations and the Federal Economic Ministry jointly coordinated the planning effort so that the FRG government could pitch the project as part of the *staatlich vermittelter Kulturaustausch*.⁶²⁶ Stressing its contribution to peace in Europe, the western side made it clear that holding the design exhibition within the same calendar year was of “political significance.”⁶²⁷ Using every available channel, the FRG impressed the significance of this cultural event for German-German relations on the SED leadership. Even Economic Minister Otto Graf Lambsdorff carried this pitch for an industrial design exhibition in his folder on a trip to the Leipzig trade fair.⁶²⁸ Only nine months after Hans Otto Bräutigam, the head of the FRG Permanent Representation in East Berlin, first proposed the design exhibition to the GDR Deputy Foreign Minister Kurt Nier on March 1984, the project came to fruition. The exhibition ran for two weeks in December 1984 as the fourth project the FRG sent as part of the *Kuturaustausch*.⁶²⁹ Bonn’s initiative signaled to the

⁶²⁴ Bräutigam (StäV) to BMB and BK, betr. Projekt einer Design-Ausstellung aus der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in der DDR, 1 March 1984, B 288/481, BAK.

⁶²⁵ Bräutigam, betr. Gespräch mit SED-Parteibüromitglied Kurt Hager am 28.9.1983, 29 September 1983, B 288/481, BAK.

⁶²⁶ Dr. Klaus-Eberhard Murawski (Bundesministerium für innerdeutsche Beziehung, BMB) an BK, betr. Offiziell vermittelte Projekte in der kulturellen Zusammenarbeit mit der DDR; hier: Vorschlag zur Design-Ausstellung, 30 January 1984, B 288/481, BAK.

⁶²⁷ Bräutigam (StäV) to BMB and BK, 1 March 1984, B 288/481, BAK.

⁶²⁸ Note, Girardet (StäV), 24 Februar 1984, B 288/481, BAK.

⁶²⁹ Bundesministerium für innerdeutsche Beziehungen, Nr. 60/84, 22 November 1984, 288/482, BAK.

international community the German determination in the 1980s to “insulate inter-German relations from the vicissitudes of relations between the superpowers.”⁶³⁰

Initially, the GDR hesitated to support the West German project. Yet after a few weeks of deliberations, it swallowed the bait that the Rat für Formgebung had put in the exhibition proposal: a symposium that would convey “specialized technical and professional details and suggestions.”⁶³¹ For the notoriously backward economy of the GDR, every occasion to learn more about western product design presented a welcome opportunity to catch up to world standards. With the exception of the location, which was hard to come by on such short notice, the preparations for Design – Thinking Ahead for Humanity went smoothly, and the exhibition opened on December 3, 1984, in the International Trade Center on Friedrichsstrasse in the heart of East Berlin. High-ranking East and West German politicians, representatives of GDR cultural organizations, and designers attended the opening event.⁶³² Even Wolfgang Schäuble, the Federal Minister in the Chancellery, stopped by for a short visit during his first official trip to the GDR. During the opening speech, Martin Kelm hinted at the political significance of German-German rapprochement: “We regard the fact that this exhibition takes place as a positive sign, particularly at a time when the international situation gives reason for serious concerns...” “Even the best intentions and the best design achievements would make no sense for humanity if a nuclear inferno cannot be prevented,” Kelm continued.⁶³³ Hans Otto Bräutigam of the Permanent Representation also included notes on the international

⁶³⁰ Elizabeth Harvey, “The Two Germanies: Recent Publications on the Federal Republic, the German Democratic Republic and the German Question,” *The Historical Journal* 33, no. 4 (1990): 968.

⁶³¹ Exhibition proposal, attached to Bräutigam (StäV) to BMB and BK, betr. Projekt einer Design-Ausstellung aus der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in der DDR, 1 March 1984, B 288/481, BAK.

⁶³² List, Teilnehmer an der Eröffnung der Ausstellung, B 288/482, BAK.

⁶³³ Martin Kelm, Opening Speech, 3 December 1984, B 288/482, BAK.

situation when he greeted the guests: “The Federal Government is determined to continue the path paved by the Basic Treaty and the Helsinki Accords. We want to extend cooperation and take advantage of every chance to improve relations. We do this conscious of our shared responsibility for peace and stability in Europe and in the interest of the people on both sides.”⁶³⁴ “Cultural activities such as this exhibition,” Bräutigam put the Western attitude in a nutshell, “are the building blocks for good-neighboring (*gutnachbarliche*) relations between the two German states.”⁶³⁵ Such expressions of “mini-détente” in German-German relations solidified the idea of their special role in maintaining east-west dialog at the heart of Europe.⁶³⁶ Sharing vital concerns about not becoming hostages of the superpower arms race with other nonnuclear nations in Europe, a unified Germany could stand for the universal values of peace and accord, rather than for economic-political domination.

The exhibition concept expressed the humanitarian goals of this show in the West German emphasis on interpersonal relations. From its inception, it was conceived as a show that displayed design’s contribution to everyday life by means of selected, progressive solutions.⁶³⁷ Humans and the social fabric stood at the center – not the products themselves – to aim at “deepening mutual knowledge about cultural and social existence” in the two German states.⁶³⁸ High-profile guests, diplomatic speeches, and the

⁶³⁴ Hans Otto Bräutigam, opening speech, 3 December 1984, B 288/482, BAK.

⁶³⁵ Ibid.

⁶³⁶ Renata Fritsch-Bournazel, *Confronting the German Question: German on the East-West Divide* (New York: Berg, 1988). This mini-détente started a wave of research on the German Question that reached publication just before the GDR collapsed in 1989. For examples of this scholarship see Edwina Moreton, ed., *Germany Between East and West* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁶³⁷ Concept, Design-Ausstellung des Rat für Formgebung in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1984, Manuskript: Dipl. Ing. Herbert Ohl, Dipl. –Des. Eckhard Neumann, Dezember 1983, B 288/481, BAK.

⁶³⁸ Bundesministerium für innerdeutsche Beziehungen, Nr. 60/84, 22 November 1984, B 288/482, BAK.

awareness that this German-German display of harmony, standing in stark contrast to the tension-filled “international situation,” benefited both sides in the diplomatic arena. The exhibition consciously continued the effort of a self-defined foreign policy that the Federal Republic had begun with *Ostpolitik* to change the Cold War *status quo*. It also constituted a continuous effort on the part of the FRG to push for direct interaction between both German populations – if only via increased knowledge about each other (see figure 23).

Nearly two hundred products, systems, and projects from more than one hundred West German businesses helped to convey the significance and evolution of industrial design in the Federal Republic. A historical section explained design development in the FRG by grounding it in the Werkbund and the Bauhaus traditions of modern, functionalist aesthetics.⁶³⁹ Visitors quickly realized that the exhibition was not a sales show when they saw the lavish products displayed for home interiors: the luxury furniture company Interlübke sent its high priced Duo-Bed, while the furniture cooperative Wohnkultur displayed the two-decade-long success story WK 470 furniture system, and Vitsoe provided an upholstery suite.⁶⁴⁰ None of the East German visitors could afford such expensive furniture. Instead, the exhibition clearly promoted the perks of the Western lifestyle with the amenities of high-end designer interiors and high-technology standards for appliances and tools. On top of these displays of affluence, the placards accompanying the interior design exhibition inflamed Eastern eyes: “In a mass society and an increasingly depersonalized environment, the personal apartment remains

⁶³⁹ Press release, “Vorausdenken für den Menschen. Design-Ausstellung des Rates für Formgebung in Berlin (Ost),” n.d., B 288/482, BAK.

⁶⁴⁰ Concept, Design-Ausstellung des Rat für Formgebung in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1984, December 1983, B 288/481, BAK.

one of the few areas where one can realize individual ideas.”⁶⁴¹ Implicit provocations such as this critique of socialist society altered the character of the cultural exchange during the two weeks that the show ran.

The initially cozy impression one gathers from the emphasis on “peace in Europe” and “German-German understanding” in the documents surrounding the conception and the opening of the exhibition is quickly revised by a closer look at the East German archives. Unbeknownst to the guest from the Federal Republic, the SED closely monitored and manipulated the exhibition. Event advertisement posters that the West German design council Rat für Formgebung provided were only posted in obscure places, if at all.⁶⁴² The GDR leadership hoped to keep the number of visitors to a minimum. Thanks to word of mouth, the frequency of visits rose by the day.⁶⁴³ In a press release, the FRG celebrated the fact that 22,000 people had seen the show within the first week, mentioning the noticeably young age of the crowd.⁶⁴⁴ This average age came courtesy of the SED, which sent party-loyal groups and young professionals or design students to the West German product show. Only about two hundred visitors were “normal” GDR citizens on the first day of Design – Thinking Ahead for Humanity.⁶⁴⁵ The East German design authorities outright confiscated a number of books that the Rat für Formgebung provided for general information about West German design.⁶⁴⁶ Moreover, the East

⁶⁴¹ Rat für Formgebung, Ausstellungstext Tafel 012, n.d., Folder “BRD Ausstellung,” SiG.

⁶⁴² Michael Blank, Tagesinformationen zur BRD-Ausstellung, 2 December 1984, Folder “Ausstellungen BRD,” SiG.

⁶⁴³ Rotraud und Herbert Pohl (textile and furniture designers) in conversation with the author, 13 January 2009.

⁶⁴⁴ Press release, „Erfolgreich: Design-Ausstellung in Berlin (Ost), n.d., B 288/482, BAK.

⁶⁴⁵ Michael Blank, Tagesinformationen zur BRD-Ausstellung, 4 December 1984, Folder “Ausstellungen BRD,” SiG.

⁶⁴⁶ Michael Blank, Tagesinformationen zur BRD-Ausstellung, 1 December 1984, Folder “Ausstellungen BRD,” SiG.

German exhibition personnel prevented contact between East German visitors and the Rat für Formgebung staff, which was present to give information."⁶⁴⁷ Instead, the East German Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung provided its own staff with a twenty-page script that would enable them to downplay western accomplishments. Emphasizing the negative effects of competitive capitalism and profit-making on the social make-up of a country, the text characterized design and its institutions in the FRG as "ineffective."⁶⁴⁸

Another contentious issue, related to the problem of advertising the exhibition, came up with the slow admission into the venue. A queue of 150-200 curious East Germans formed in front of the International Trade Center every day. Officials from the permanent representation stopped by several times and asked the Amt für Formgestaltung staff to open more registers to decrease the waiting time. The GDR pretended to be bullied, claiming that the FRG connected political profitability to attendance.⁶⁴⁹ The West Germans ignored this provocation. Overall attendance in eighteen days amounted to more than 66,000 with every one of the 40,000 available catalogs sold. After a GDR observer initially misevaluated the show as an expert event – based on visitors' lack of interest in the placard texts – he remarked that guests increasingly showed interest in the information and technical descriptions provided via the placards in the following days.⁶⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the feared spectacle of a big protest failed to appear. The staff members of the Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung had been afraid that the displays of Western

⁶⁴⁷ Michael Blank, Tagesinformationen zur BRD-Ausstellung, 16 December 1984, Folder "Ausstellungen BRD," SiG.

⁶⁴⁸ Argumentationsmaterial für die Betreuer der Ausstellung "Design – Vorausdenken für den Menschen. Eine Ausstellung aus der Bundesrepublik Deutschland" zur Situation des Design in der BRD, 15 November 1984, Folder "BRD-Ausstellung 3. – 20.12.1984," SiG.

⁶⁴⁹ Michael Blank, Tagesinformationen zur BRD-Ausstellung, 11 December 1984, Folder "Ausstellungen BRD," SiG.

⁶⁵⁰ Michael Blank, Tagesinformationen zur BRD-Ausstellung, 4 December 1984, Folder "Ausstellungen BRD," SiG.

affluence could cause open critique of the socialist system and its economic shortcomings from their fellow countrymen. Yet the concluding internal event report described visitor reaction as “confident and competent-critical (*souverän-kritisch*) with specialized design interest.”⁶⁵¹ Perhaps to overstate their level of control over the event, the staff did not record visitors’ disgruntlement. After testing the waters of cultural exchange with the Federal Republic and with a public relations fiasco successfully averted, the SED leadership confidently finished the negotiations over the German-German *Kulturabkommen* without initiating further complications. Now that the West German event had ended, the GDR design institution looked forward to sending an exhibition to the West in accordance with the principle of reciprocity.

After the postponement of the reciprocal industrial design show for a number of years, it finally materialized in May 1988. The Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung, the ministries for Foreign Affairs and Intra-German Trade, the combines as well as design schools worked together on the Design in the GDR exhibition. One of the regional design institutions in the West, the Design Center in Stuttgart, hosted the exhibition in its representational nineteenth-century building, far from Bonn. To ensure the political, ideological, economic, and promotional success of the event, the SED leadership demanded elaborate advertising strategies.⁶⁵² But the FRG government quickly thwarted such efforts to increase the event’s significance. When the time arrived to print the catalog, the GDR Permanent Representation in Bonn asked for a greeting from the Chief

⁶⁵¹ Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung, Bericht über die Durchführung der Ausstellung ‘Design-Vorausdenken für den Menschen. Eine Ausstellung aus der Bundesrepublik Deutschland’ im Internationalen Handelszentrum, in Berlin, Hauptstadt der DDR, 20 December 1984, p. 5, Folder “Ausstellungen BRD,” SiG.

⁶⁵² Organisationsprojekt und 1. Ideenskizze: Zur Ausstellung des Amtes für industrielle Formgestaltung der DDR in der BRD 1988, Berlin 1. Juli 1987, B 288/497, BAK.

of the Chancellery of the Federal Republic.⁶⁵³ Pointing to the precedent set at the 1984 exhibition in East Berlin, where Kelm and other high-ranking GDR politicians participated, the eastern side called on the principle of reciprocity. To their great astonishment, the West German government denied the demand, claiming that “these kinds of forewords were common during the period of rare, individual state-mediated cultural projects in prior years. In the light of the extensive project list agreed upon after the signing of the *Kulturabkommen*, this kind of high-level preface should not generally be planned on; they should be reserved for especially high-ranking projects.”⁶⁵⁴ Diplomatic gestures such as an official greeting would only further legitimize the GDR, which was of no interest to Bonn. With the signing of the cultural agreement in 1986, the FRG had reached its goal of securing German-German exchanges on a non-governmental level and this exhibition presented the perfect opportunity to put this achievement into practice. If the East had not noticed the political effects of the *Kulturabkommen* at the time, they surely realized them in 1988.

A loss of diplomatic significance in conjunction with the provincial exhibition location demoted the GDR design show from a national event of political importance to a regional event of purely economic interest. Accordingly, only a regional politician attended the opening event: the Baden-Württemberg Economic Minister Martin Herzog. Not even the West German Rat für Formgebung paid an official visit. The FRG design journal *Form* covered the exhibition only in a small note in its news section. Eight lines long, it stated matter-of-factly that 170 products from the GDR were on display in

⁶⁵³ Dr. Thunig-Nittner, Sekretär Brandstädter von der StÄV/DDR und Frau Dr. Thunig-Nittner vom BK, 1. Dezember 1987, B 288/497, BAK.

⁶⁵⁴ Dr. Thunig-Nittner, betr. Geleitwort für Katalog, 23 December 1987, B 288/497, BAK.

Stuttgart's design center between May 26 and July 31, 1988, providing broader historical as well as recent insights into GDR design development.⁶⁵⁵

Meanwhile, the eastern side tried to make the best of a bad situation. *Form und Zweck* dedicated an entire page to the exhibition. Exaggerating the importance of the Stuttgart Design Center, the article described the challenges of putting together the exposition in such a "lavish" environment. "We could not simply present products with 'Design in der DDR' because it was important to depict the way of living and culture, to convey knowledge about the country, its economic potential, and its people," the author explained.⁶⁵⁶ In this regard, the GDR project emulated the 1984 FRG show – the event aimed at creating a dialogue and deepening mutual understanding, while not shying away from "critical comparison."⁶⁵⁷ But the result was quite different. Over the five weeks of its run, a mere 18,000 people visited the exhibition. According to the East German article, West German visitors perceived GDR design as high quality in its usefulness and as "aesthetically respectable without attempting to circumvent social responsibility with spectacular pieces."⁶⁵⁸ Although not exactly a rave review, the design council staff seemed satisfied about having proven the GDR's prowess as an export nation.

Conclusion

Later in 1988, the FRG liaison for the GDR Permanent Representation in Bonn summarized the lessons learned in the German-German cultural exchange. The memo stated that there had been manifold possibilities for cultural contacts and exchanges with

⁶⁵⁵ Design der DDR erstmals in der Bundesrepublik," in *Form*, 2/1988, 64.

⁶⁵⁶ Michael Blank, "Design in der DDR: Ausstellung in Stuttgart, BRD," in *Form und Zweck*, 6/1988, 48.

⁶⁵⁷ Concept, Organisationsprojekt und 1. Ideenskizze zur Ausstellung des Amtes für industrielle Formgestaltung der DDR in der BRD 1988, Folder "BRD 1988," SiG.

⁶⁵⁸ Blank, "Design in der DDR," 48.

persons and institutions in the GDR, especially since there was no language barrier and a plentitude of shared traditions. However, “Cooperation in the classical sense was very rare, because the GDR avoids ‘the all-German’ (*Gesamtdeutsches*).”⁶⁵⁹ It was difficult for the GDR, as a socialist country, to uphold its policy of delineation after the agreed-upon cooperation in the Basic Treaty and the *Kulturabkommen*. While the situation with the East improved over time from the Western perspective, the GDR preferred cultural cooperation with countries of the Eastern Bloc precisely for reasons of demarcation. Nevertheless, the piecemeal effort to improve German-German relations via cultural cooperation paid off for both sides.

While Bonn aborted the Hallstein Doctrine as the international climate changed from confrontation to *détente*, it capitalized on this moment to emancipate itself from superpower politics by creating a sustainable German-German dialogue. Of course, the four-power agreements still decided the fate of Germany on a diplomatic level, but the German-German policy of *rapprochement* clearly improved and facilitated contacts between the East and West on an individual and organizational level. By pushing for non-governmental relations between East and West Germans, especially in the realm of culture, Bonn achieved its long-term goal of loosening the SED’s grip on every aspect of East German social and cultural life. The shared cultural heritage and the significance of the *Kulturnation* concept for both German states resulted in ongoing exchanges that brought – in the case of industrial design – each Germany closer to the reality of the everyday on the other side of the border. And despite its lack of autonomy from the

⁶⁵⁹ Thunig-Nittner to Gerz, EC-Meeting 10. 11.1988, hier: Bereich Kultur, 9 November 1988, B 288/256, BAK.

Soviet Union, the GDR was able to “function as an actor on the world stage.”⁶⁶⁰ The Bonn-East Berlin negotiations were part and parcel of the GDR’s transition from a pariah state to a member of the UN. In the process, the GDR broke the West German *Alleinvertretungsanspruch*. Its claim to membership among modern nations, expressed and communicated through GDR material culture, now received politically legitimization.

Through the medium of industrial design both Germanys turned a competitive situation, which could have easily been just another Cold War race between East and West, into a diplomatic tool for rapprochement. The aesthetization of the respective economic, social, and political orders in German material culture provided them with a *lingua franca* that facilitated exchange and human interaction across the Wall. With the German-German *modus vivendi* in place, stable peace in Europe became feasible. Only after the West German ratification of the Moscow and Warsaw Treaties did Britain, the United States, France and the Soviet Union sign the Four-Power Agreement of 1972; and only after the signing of the Basic Treaty did the Helsinki talks advance toward successful completion.⁶⁶¹

⁶⁶⁰ Sarotte, *Dealing with the Devil*, 3.

⁶⁶¹ Herbert Ammon and Peter Brandt, “The Relevance of the German Question for Peace in Europe,” *International Journal of Politics* 13, no. 1/2, Germany Debates Defense (1983): 83-96.

EPILOGUE

Divided by the Iron Curtain, Germany presents an ideal setting to study the at times accidental ways in which socialist and capitalist countries found an understanding during the Cold War. Although each Germany strove to integrate itself within its respective ideological bloc, the special situation of the German Question kept East and West Germans together, much like the wish to maintain peace in Europe tied their neighboring countries together. This work offers insights into the intricate nature of German-German relations by exploring German *Wohnkultur*. Material culture served as a field for competition until these exchanges developed a shared language of progress and security, enabling mutual projects that contributed to German growing diplomatic independence in respect to the superpowers. The two German states, while located geographically at the periphery of European integration, created a political space influenced by larger processes that worked to balance the East-West relationship of the Cold War in Europe: economic cooperation, global détente, and peaceful coexistence. Bringing these areas of cooperation into focus enables us to appreciate the continuous ties between the FRG and GDR that opened up a sustainable dialog and maintained a certain degree of mutual understanding throughout the Cold War. The relatively smooth transition from the collapse of the GDR to German unification, then, seems less unexpected, because the GDR was already participating in and contributing to the West European idea of an aesthetic modernity.

Divided Germany's postwar history is largely about the way in which two opposing ideological systems faced the same postwar challenges. The Federal Republic and the GDR embarked on a mission for cultural rebirth in order to overcome wartime

destruction and the distrust of the international community. Integration into the West and East seemed the most convenient option as goals for reunification were repeatedly postponed. Whereas their European neighbors feared the strength of a reunited Germany, the political leaderships on each side of the border wanted to see their respective experiment of state-building come to fruition. This new beginning manifested itself in the reconstruction of German *Wohnkultur*, which developed against the background of three confluent concerns: the shadow of the Nazi Past, demarcation in the German Question, and Germany's global position. As the governments in Bonn and East Berlin strove to distance themselves from the legacy of the Third Reich, they faced a new imperative to reimagine the cultural and social fabric of the German states. Industrial design became central to the political and economic rebuilding of Germany. As such, both Germanys extended debates about the meaning and function of material culture in the early reconstruction years.

Instead of a new beginning, however, continuity in aesthetic expression undermined visions for a fundamentally changed Germany. At first, the social ideals and hopefulness of Weimar modernism informed developments in East and West Germany. Designers relied on the aesthetics of the interwar years after 1945, leading to dramatically different results after the early 1950s critique of modernism. In the West, this aesthetic lived on as a functionalist consensus through the activism of the politically well-connected Werkbund. Functionalism demonstrated West Germany's Western integration as it shared modernist aspirations with other Western countries. At the same time, it communicated Adenauer's policy of strength in the German Question. This policy was fueled by the conservative belief that German unification on democratic terms could only

materialize through alignment with the West and in opposition to the Soviet-dominated East. The fact that this policy of strength foreclosed the opportunity to reconcile with the eastern part, however, did not seem to matter to Bonn in the early 1950s. Rather, the government focused on reconnecting the Federal Republic to western world standards in cultural progress and technological development. Consequently, economic and diplomatic interests superseded concerns about unification of Germany until the mid-1960s. In this way, the GDR lost its significance for Bonn in regard to the future of a democratic Germany. Meanwhile, the GDR looked toward socialism as the answer for a rebirth of Germany and a radical break with the Third Reich legacy. After initial experiments with functionalism, the GDR tapped into an aesthetic past that preceded Nazism and emulated the socialist realist doctrines of cultural Stalinism. The material environment connected to this aesthetic, which included the often petit-bourgeois interiors of the early twentieth century, mirrored the personal preferences and experience of the middle-aged GDR leadership. In aligning itself with the Eastern Bloc, East Germany's government claimed the cultural heritage of the turn of the nineteenth century that combined their traditionalist outlook on German identity with the necessities of demarcation from the West in the German Question.

By the mid-1960s both German states were forced to acknowledge the truth that the primacy of their diplomatic considerations had not created a real cultural break with the past. The relationship between people and their possessions had received updated appearances but no new content. Objects still signified social status, which the promotion of Good Design and the fight against kitsch as a marker of moral decay only affirmed. In failing to create a sense of belonging among the population through ideological

inscription of material culture, the focus of the German Cold War shifted to the realm of economics. Political legitimacy increasingly rested on the ability to provide a good standard of living. Consequently, the two states created materialistic narratives of national brands to facilitate the population's identification with the new state. The Federal Republic benefitted from the economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s, which convinced many West Germans of the advantages of democracy. In contrast, the GDR tried to advance its economy with Five-Year Plans, not only to compete with the leading industrialized nations but most importantly to convince its citizens of the advantages of socialism. In order for the national brand to develop its integrative power, however, all participants in the production and consumption processes needed to support this endeavor, which became difficult over time. Yet an increasing gap between centralized cultural policy and regional economic interests undermined the brand narrative's coherence. By the 1970s it became evident that production optimization and consumer choice trumped governmental visions for a cohesive aesthetic identity.

Having failed to devise a strong national brand identity, both German states remained vulnerable to external influences. With the shift from cultural to economic competition, the GDR invited West German capitalist success into the socialist realm. Encounters at the fair and intra-German trade opened the doors to growing interdependence. On the one hand, constant comparison generated exchanges in governmental, industrial, and design circles, thereby increasing awareness of aesthetic developments in domestic culture on the other side of the border. On the other hand, the trade fairs logically led to an increase in collaborative manufacturing between East and West German industry. Generous credit conditions in intra-German trade fortified ties

between East and West when the GDR restructured its industry-oriented economy in the 1960s to satisfy consumer demands. These German-German dealings proceeded alongside the European integration process and the creation of the Common Market. Through its special relationship with the Federal Republic, the GDR became an unofficial member of the European Community. This status allowed the GDR to benefit from tariff exemptions by introducing products through West Germany into the EEC zone. Meanwhile, the European market incentives affected the appearance of East and West German furniture dialectically, and the two German states moved closer to a shared modern European product culture. This aesthetic Europeanization expressed the wish of both countries to regain a status of significance among the modern industrial nations as well as to be active contributors to the cultural fabric of Europe as they imagined it. Notions of a broader European identity, connected to hopes for a peaceful coexistence, flourished with the solidifying of European cultural and political processes.⁶⁶² Although Western integration had been a dominant foreign policy principle in the Federal Republic since the 1950s, Bonn also emphasized the cultural and political importance of German-German interaction in the European context throughout the 1960s and the 1970s. Politically, the German Question superseded economic concerns in the Federal Republic. It safeguarded trade relations with the GDR from interference from France, Italy, and the Benelux countries to create a sustainable East-West dialog in the realm of export and material culture. At this point, the Federal Republic could afford to embark on political flirtations with the East as it was firmly integrated into the West.

⁶⁶² Mattei Dogan, "The Decline of Nationalisms within Western Europe," in *Comparative Politics*, vol. 26, no. 3 (1993), 281-305.

This trend toward a German Cold War policy, detached from the concerns of the superpowers and the European neighbors, intensified with the German-German rapprochement during the détente years. Culminating in an agreement on the status quo of Germany's division with the Basic Treaty of 1972, fundamental political disagreements could be tabled in order to foster contacts across the border. The *Kulturabkommen* that grew out of the Basic Treaty negotiations eventually "normalized" German-German interactions for cultural events, sports meets, and youth exchanges. By creating direct contact between the populations of East and West Germany without the involvement of the state, the German Question moved beyond the reach of both the GDR government and superpower involvement. To a certain extent, Germans could work together toward unity again. Industrial design, which had for so long served as a field for Cold War competition, became an arena in which to mediate and channel the German Cold War as it turned into a *lingua franca* through which Bonn and East Berlin could communicate. A vocabulary for transparency, humanity, and morality developed that shaped German engagement for peace in Europe in the 1980s since both Germanys faced similar struggles in the effort to overcome the legacy of the Nazi past, the reconstruction of the country, the struggle for international recognition and membership among the modern industrialized nations. When the superpowers ended global détente by stationing new nuclear missiles in Europe, the two German states took the opportunity to define their own position on these policies by cooperating in mutual exhibition projects against renewed arms buildup. This endeavor provided both Germanys with a certain degree of emancipation from the United States and the Soviet Union. However, such German-

German interactions were less than harmonious, leaving the GDR to feel torn between economic opportunities in the West and political backing in the East.

One event that displayed this ambivalence in the aftermath of the Basic Treaty and the Helsinki Accords was the annual *Ostseewoche* (Baltic Sea Week) in the East German city of Rostock. Between 1958 and 1975, it was one of the most important international events that the GDR hosted. The *Ostseewoche* allowed the East German leadership to increase its international standing and to contribute to the “tradition of good relations between the German and Northern European towns and communities.”⁶⁶³ After initial hesitation, the countries abutting the Baltic Sea increasingly sent diplomatic representatives to the event. By bringing these countries together in cultural performances, sport contests, product fairs and economic and environmental talks, the GDR claimed that the *Ostseewoche* contributed to peace in Europe.⁶⁶⁴ Of course, these annual happenings also served as a diplomatic stepping-stone in East Germany’s pursuit of regional influence.⁶⁶⁵ The state carefully presented itself in a progressive and modern manner. For example, the product fair showcased a furniture system in 1968 that the government commissioned just for this occasion under the fitting name of “Rostock.”⁶⁶⁶ It exemplified GDR efforts to find adequate solutions for furnishing prefabricated

⁶⁶³ Michael F. Scholz, “Der Weg zur ersten Ostseewoche in Rostock 1958,” in *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, Vol. 34, Nr. 4 (1988): 320.

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid., 317-324.

⁶⁶⁵ GDR historian Michael F. Scholz evaluated the significance of the *Ostseewoche* as follows: “Der außenpolitische Aktionsradius der DDR in West- und Nordeuropa war zu dieser Zeit auf Nachrichtenwesen, Verkehr, Sport und Kultur begrenzt. Noch fehlten diplomatische und z.T. offizielle Handelsbeziehungen zu den nordeuropäischen Staaten, die unter dem Druck der Bonner ‘Hallstein-Doktrin’ nicht bereit waren, gleichberechtigte Beziehungen zur DDR aufzunehmen. Nur Finnland erkannte die Alleinvertretungsmaßnahmen der BRD nicht an und unterhielt in beiden deutschen Staaten Handelsvertretungen mit diplomatischen und konsularischen Rechten.” “Der Weg zur ersten Ostseewoche in Rostock 1958,” in *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, vol. 34, no. 4 (1988): 317-318.

⁶⁶⁶ “Möbelprogramm ‘Rostock’ – Resultat richtiger Raumnutzung,” in *Form und Zweck*, 1/1969, 15. See also Folder “Ausstellung ‘Möbelprogramm Rostock’,” SiG.

housing. This resulted from a series of experiments for “variable living” by the centralized urban planning institution Deutsche Bauakademie, in collaboration with furniture designers to maximize options for storage, seating, decorative space, and even sleeping in the living room. Reviewing the modular system, the East German design journal *Form und Zweck* used the same neo-functionalist terminology of rationality, functionality, and versatility used in the West.⁶⁶⁷ Again, the GDR used the language of industrial design to present its progressiveness and acknowledgement of individuality despite its collectivist ideology. In this way, the East German leadership endeavored to appeal to western nations by emphasizing its humane side and downplaying the coercive nature of its economic and social systems.

In 1976, a year after the signing of the Helsinki accords, the GDR demoted the *Ostseewoche* to a cultural fair and refrained from inviting diplomatic representatives of the Baltic Sea nations henceforth.⁶⁶⁸ FRG diplomats had expected an abrupt change in policy, as it was consistent with the GDR’s general policy shift from dialog to delineation in the aftermath of the Basic Treaty, yet they still speculated about plausible reasons behind East Berlin’s decision. Among the possible scenarios which the head of West Germany’s Permanent Representation in East Berlin listed was the low participation of high-ranking official representatives of Baltic Sea countries at the previous *Ostseewoche*, the avoidance of “a certain competition with the Federal Republic in the Baltic,” and the possibility of growing Soviet mistrust toward too much “East-West hanky-panky” (“*ost-westliches Techtelmechtel*”) in the central Baltic region.⁶⁶⁹ However, these interpretations

⁶⁶⁷ Lothar Walk, “Rostock – ein Baukasten,” in *Form und Zweck*, 1/1970, 36-43.

⁶⁶⁸ Gaus to Foreign Office, betr. Rostocker Ostseewoche, 26 January 1976, B 288/94, BAK.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid.

see the GDR exclusively in a position of weakness and ignore the strategic nature of the GDR's decision to eliminate the diplomatic dimension of the event.

On closer examination, the new conception of the *Ostseewoche* is yet further proof of the GDR's participation in processes of Europeanization. By 1976, the East German leadership had gained international acknowledgement in the United Nations and had shown its significance as a sovereign state in the Basic Treaty and the détente process leading up to Helsinki. Consequently, the *Ostseewoche* had fulfilled its political function. Honecker could have chosen to abandon the event all together to please the Soviet Union and avoid competition with the Federal Republic in the Baltic region. Yet he continued the event with a focus on cultural exchange and knowledge transfer, thus turning it into a forum for the GDR to be an active player in the development of a constructive European identity. By keeping the dialog with the Baltic countries open, the GDR could work its way around the Iron Curtain while minimizing the potential for political controversy with either the Soviet Union or the Federal Republic. Nevertheless, this event and the question that it raises indicate the need for more research on East Germany's position on European cooperation. What exactly moved the GDR to scale back official diplomacy with the West in the aftermath of the Basic Treaty, but made it open up again to German-German cooperation during a time of worsening Cold War tensions between the superpowers in the early 1980s? And what kinds of conclusions does the East German case allow us to draw in regard to other Central European countries, seeing that the GDR had special ties with the West? Taking the GDR as an example of cultural Europeanization outside of the official EEC zone opens up interesting avenues of inquiry for the integration and expansion process of the European Union in the first decade of this century, one that

included many of the former Soviet satellite states such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary. Tired of being the buffer for American and Soviet security interests, these countries began to break away from the Eastern Bloc even before the GDR. An analysis of the interaction of Eastern European regional politics with pan-European cultural ideas could offer new insights about the recent integration process and even suggest broader patterns of European identity formation.

For the GDR, the events of 1989 cut the scope of such an investigation short. Instead of seeing its contribution to European culture unfold by becoming an EEC member in its own right, the East German population saw many of its achievements simply swallowed up when the Federal Republic absorbed it in 1990. Contrary to the plans for an all-German constitution spelled out in the Basic Law, unified Germany kept the 1949 law with minor alterations. Seeing an historic opportunity, West German Chancellor Kohl rushed the unification process without spending time on such considerations, which was both to West Germany's advantage and disadvantage. From the perspective of Bonn, the Basic Law did not need to be changed, taking the fact that the Federal Republic was the last German state standing as proof of a success story. While nothing in terms of political culture, administrative structure and international significance changed for the FRG, East Germany simply disappeared from the map in a matter of a few months. Bankruptcy and revelations of its corrupt, dysfunctional economy discredited the GDR and every fiber of its political and public life. Accordingly, the FRG laid claim to being the sole "modern" German society out of political necessity to maintain leadership in the unification process. Contemporary debates about the healthcare system have shown that any of the positive results that East

Germany brought forward would carry the stigma of socialism and the GDR dictatorship. Searching for reform ideas for the reorganization of medical treatment in Germany to reduce costs, the Federal Republic turns to Scandinavian nations for solutions rather than building on the experience of East German polyclinics. This seems like a lost opportunity to apply lessons that could have been learned by studying social policy in the East. In turn, western ignorance has triggered the *Ostalgie* debate about the merits of social security, consumption, and material culture in the GDR. *Ostalgie* is a pun that combines the German words for nostalgia and East (*Ost*) to denominate former GDR citizens' longing for the financial safety and social certainty of the socialist German state. It is the claim to a positive East German identity. At the same time, the term signifies gradual amnesia towards the violence with which this state forced its citizens to stay and the Stasi intruded into their private lives. Additionally the *Ostalgie* debate unintentionally ridicules the East German everyday by focusing on kitschy gadgets, such as the Sandman figurine or colorful egg-holder cups in the shape of roosters, when addressing the socialist material culture. This seems to be an overcompensation for the West German perspective that views the GDR as largely gray and dusty, which is ironic, because western functionalism itself was mocked as "rectangular, gray, and stackable" ("*vierreckig, grau und stapelbar*"). By showing how material culture both reflected and channeled the political realities of the German division, this work illustrates how the German Question was linked to concepts of European cultural unity. Perhaps it is time to end a debate that is trying to justify a dictatorial regime, and rather acknowledge that the East Germans themselves were a constituent part of this European modernity that the West has since successfully claimed for itself.

APPENDIX: FIGURES

**Figure 1: Bauhaus Newspaper Shelf, Walter Gropius, designed 1923.
Photo copyright Katrin Schreiter.**



**Figure 2: Exhibition "We're building a better life," 1952.
Photo copyright unsettled, Schwinning Estate, Werkbund Archiv Berlin.**



**Figure 3: Interior design display in East Berlin's first high-rise, May 1952.
Photo copyright Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-14563-0005, Heinz Funck.**



Figure 4: View into the West German exhibition at the World Exposition in Brussels, 1958.
Photo copyright Werkbund Archiv, all rights reserved.



Figure 5: Werkbundkiste, 1958. Die Neue Sammlung – Staatliches Museum für angewandte Kunst, Munich.
 Photo copyright Sophie-Renate Gnam.

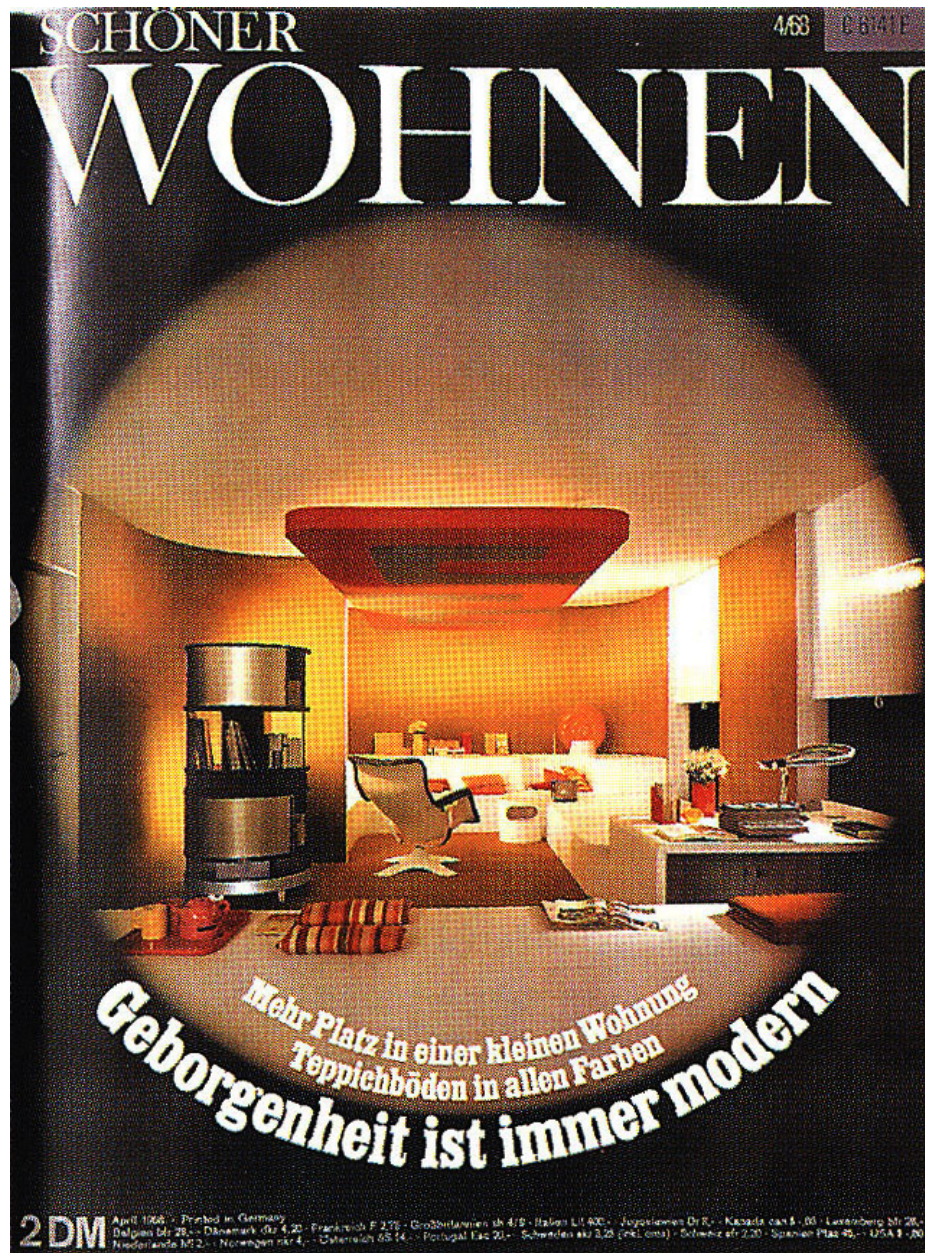


Figure 6: Peter Maly, cover for *Schöner Wohnen*, 1968. Photograph copyright Richard Stradtman für *Schöner Wohnen*



Figure 7: Rolf Heide for *Brigitte*, “Neue Formen, Farben und Materialien in alternativen Räumen: auch unter Dach kann man gut leben. 1968.

Photo copyright Ortwin Müller



Figure 8: Rolf Heide, room setting for *Schöner Wohnen*, 1986.

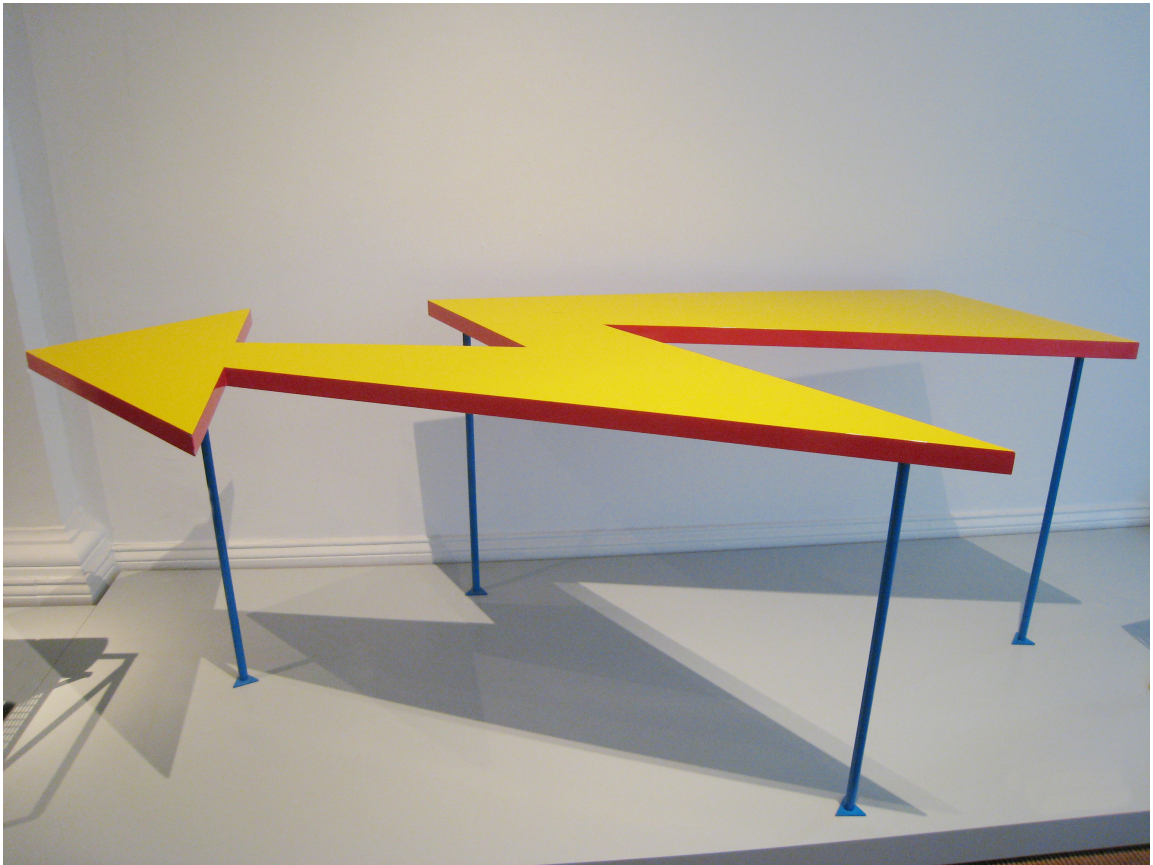
Photo copyright Winfried Nörenberg.



Figure 9: MDW furniture system, designed by Rudolf Horn for the East German furniture combine Deutsche Werkstätten Hellerau, 1967.
Photo copyright Burg Giebichenstein, Halle.



**Figure 10: Spektrum furniture system, produced by Hülsta in West Germany, 1985.
Photo copyright Hülsta.**



**Figure 11: "Blitz Tisch," designed by Wolfgang Flatz, 1982.
Photo copyright Katrin Schreiter.**



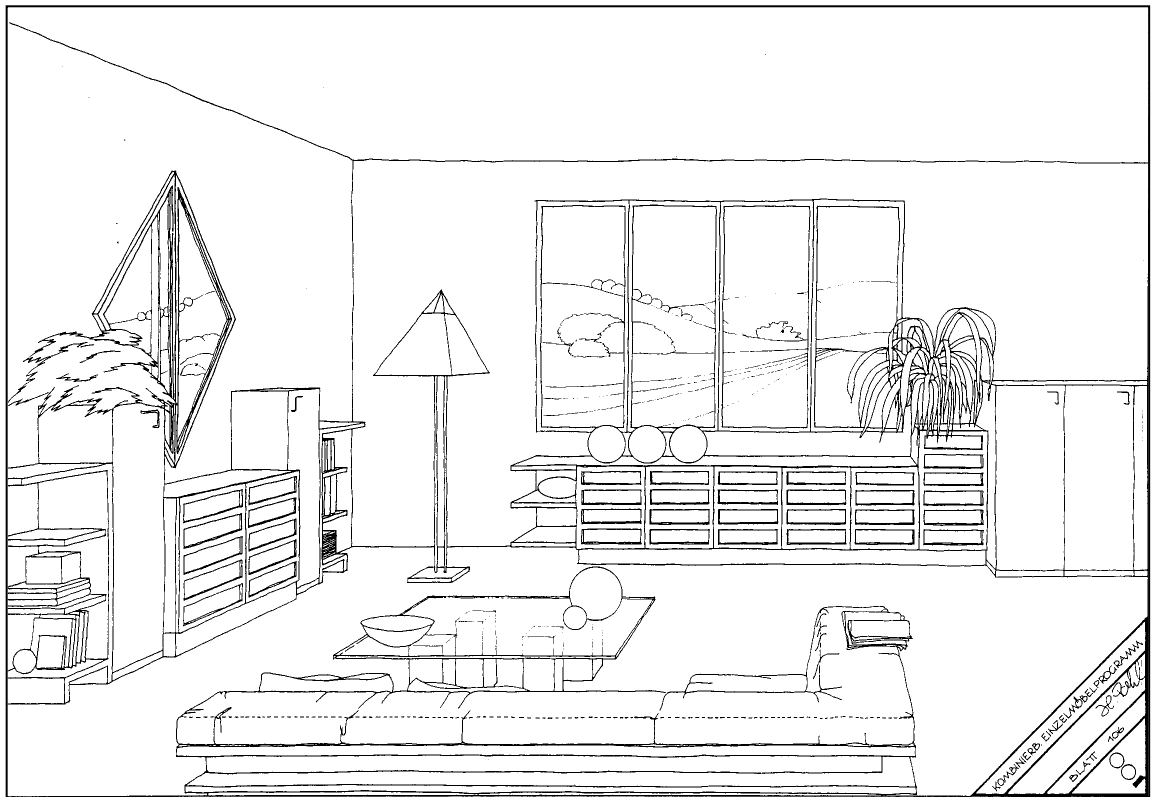
Figure 12: Bar "Duo," designed by Peter Maly for the West German furniture company Interlübke, 1986.

Photo copyright Rudolf Schmutz, jr.



Figure 13: "Zyklus" chair, designed by Peter Maly for the West German upholstery company COR, 1984.

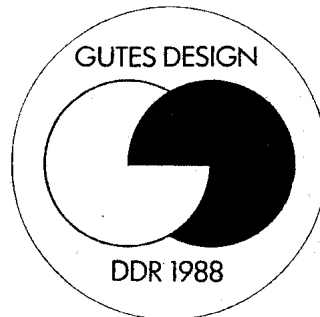
Photo copyright Rudolf Schmutz, jr.



**Figure 14: Interior design study for the East German concept furniture "Metropol," designed by Herbert Pohl, 1986.
Copyright Herbert Pohl.**



**Figure 15: Furniture program "Metropol," designed by Herbert Pohl, 1986.
Photo copyright Herbert Pohl.**



DIE AUSZEICHNUNG
 DER LEIPZIGER HERBSTMESSE 1988
GUTES DESIGN
 WIRD IN ANERKENNUNG
 HERVORRAGENDER DESIGNQUALITÄT
 DEM PRODUKT
MÖBELPROGRAMM „METROPOL“
 VEB MÖBELKOMBINAT BERLIN
 VERLIEHEN.

LEIPZIG, AM 9. SEPTEMBER 1988

Prof. Dr. Martin Kelm
 Staatssekretär

Leiter des Amtes für industrielle Formgestaltung

Siegfried Fischer
 Generaldirektor

des Leipziger Messeamtes

Figure 16: Award "Gutes Design" for the "Metropol" furniture program, 1988.
 Private Collection of Herbert Pohl.



**Figure 17: Desk, designed by Rotraut Pohl for the East Berlin furniture combine, 1987.
Photo copyright Rotraut Pohl.**



**Figure 18: Hülsta interior design exhibition at the Cologne International Furniture Fair, 1982.
Photo copyright Gerhard Wetzig.**

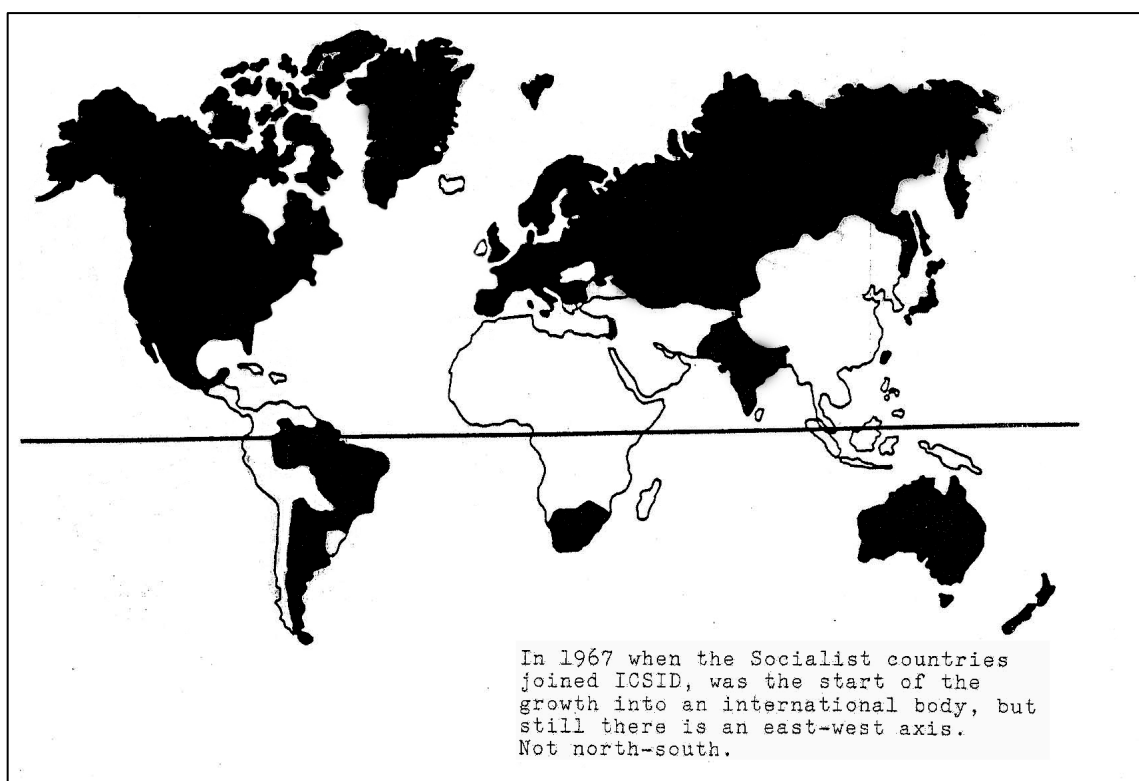
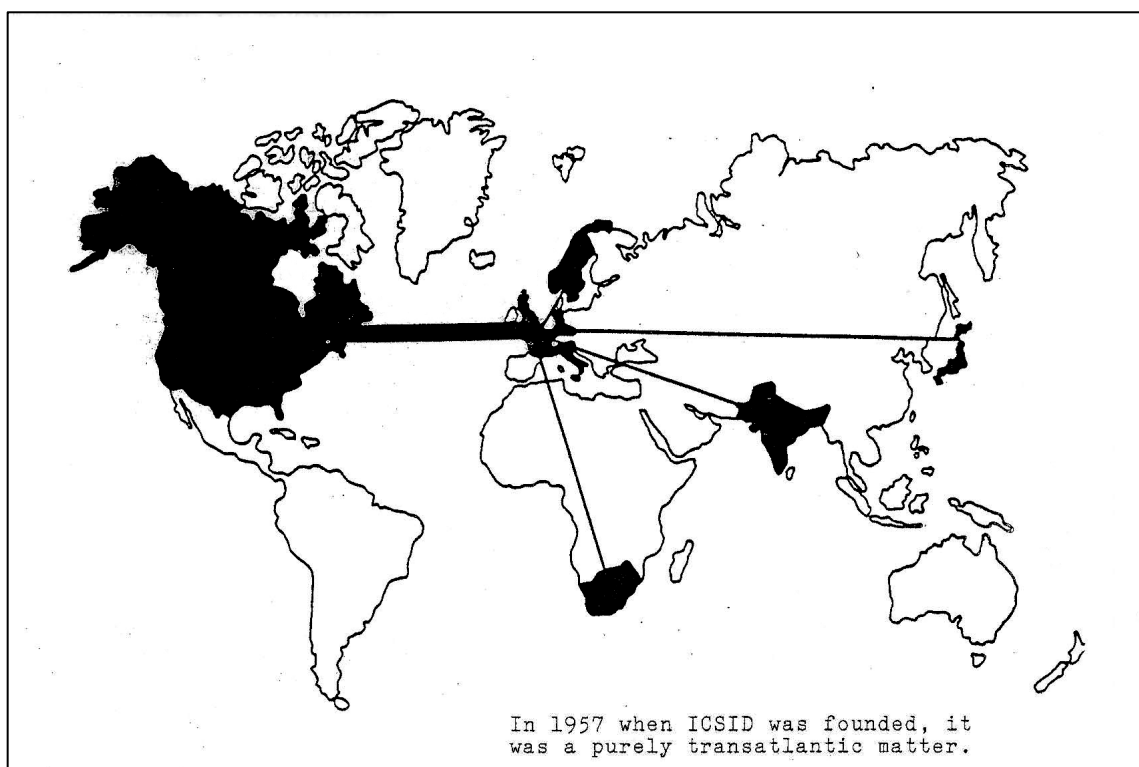
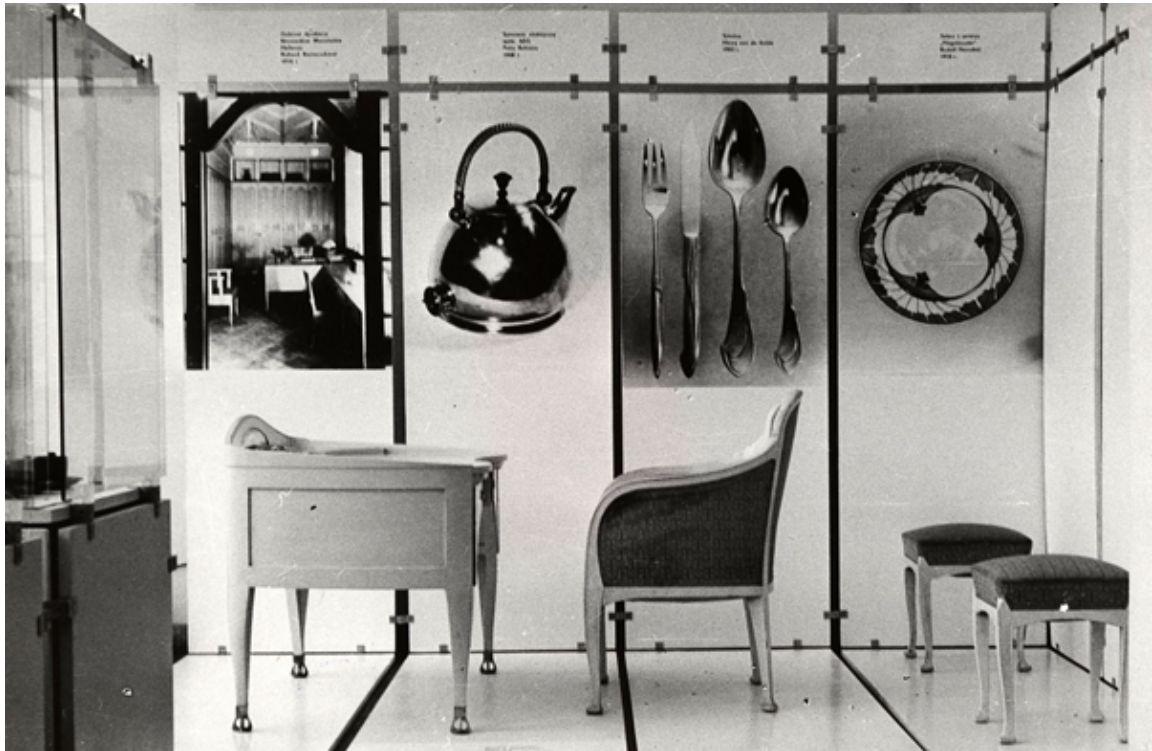
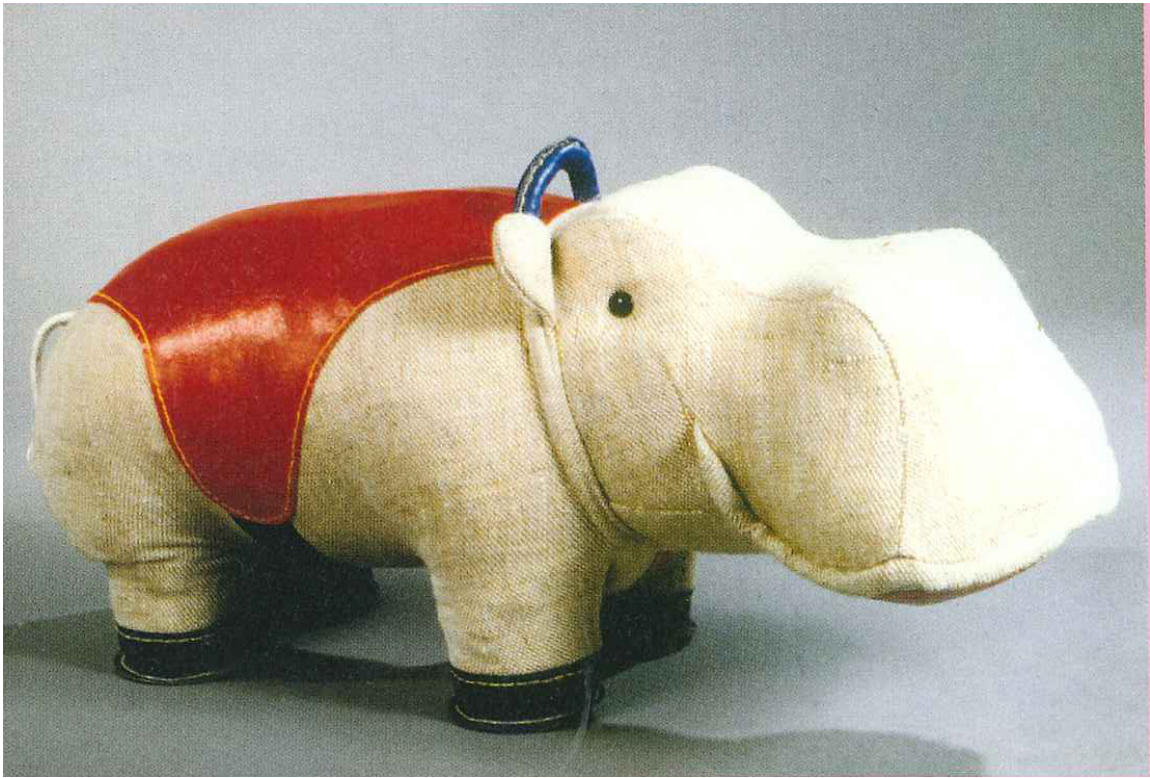


Figure 19: Maps depicting the eastward expansion of ICSID.
Copyright ICSID.



**Figure 20: The historical section of East Germany's FFQ exhibition in Warsaw, 1967.
Photo copyright unsettled.**



**Figure 21: East German toy, exhibited at "GDR Design" in London, 1970.
Photo copyright Günter Höhne.**



Figure 22: Plastic garden chair, exhibited at "GDR Design" in London, 1970.

Photo

copyright

Günter

Höhne.



Figure 23: East and West German designers at the opening of the West German exhibition "Design-Vorausdenken für den Mensch," 1984.

On the far left: Rat für Formgebung president Philipp Rosenthal, and next to him is Martin Kelm, the head of the Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung.

Photo copyright unsettled.

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DG 4 Ministerium für Leichtindustrie

DG 5 Ministerium für Bezirksgeleitete und Lebensmittelindustrie

DF 5 Amt für Standardisierung

DF 7 Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung

DH 2 Bauakademie der DDR

DL 2 Ministerium für Außenhandel

DL 102 Institut für Marktforschung

Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BAK)

B 102 Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft (BMWi)

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Karin Hirdina

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